

COMMENTARIES ON THE PENTATEUCH



NUMBERS

ROUSAS JOHN RUSHDOONY



VALLECITO, CALIFORNIA

Copyright 2006
by Mark R. Rushdoony

Chalcedon / Ross House Books
PO Box 158
Vallecito, CA 95251
www.chalcedon.edu

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise — except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2006903755
ISBN: 1-879998-45-9

Printed in the United States of America

Other books by
Rousas John Rushdoony

The Institutes of Biblical Law, Vol. I
The Institutes of Biblical Law, Vol. II, Law & Society
The Institutes of Biblical Law, Vol. III, The Intent of the Law
Systematic Theology (2 volumes)
Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Chariots of Prophetic Fire
Thy Kingdom Come
The Gospel of John
Romans & Galatians
Hebrews, James & Jude
Larceny in the Heart
Noble Savages
The Death of Meaning
To Be As God
The Biblical Philosophy of History
The Mythology of Science
Foundations of Social Order
This Independent Republic
The Nature of the American System
The "Atheism" of the Early Church
The Messianic Character of American Education
The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum
Christianity and the State
Salvation and Godly Rule
God's Plan for Victory
Politics of Guilt and Pity
The One and the Many
Revolt Against Maturity
By What Standard?
Law & Liberty

CHALCEDON / ROSS HOUSE BOOKS

PO Box 158
Vallecito, CA 95251
www.chalcedon.edu

The publication of the fourth volume in R. J. Rushdoony's Commentaries on the Pentateuch was underwritten by the Darlene Selbrede Memorial Trust Fund.

Darlene Valerie Hall Selbrede
August 18, 1965 – January 24, 2005

"The hand of the diligent shall bear rule." (Proverbs 12:24)

Darlene embraced the Lord's work with all her strength, laboring sacrificially as Chalcedon's webmaster until the day the Lord called her home.

Numbers 6:2 affirms that women can undertake consecration as Nazarites and discharge functions no less holy or important as those of the priesthood. As R. J. Rushdoony wrote to her, "Our Lord has a *mighty purpose* for you in time and *eternity*."

The capital used to publish this volume is part of that purpose. In her own words, as she labored in His vineyard, she "dwelt upon what His word promises to those who faithfully *keep* His word: a crown to throw at the feet of our Lord and Saviour."

The works of R. J. Rushdoony equipped Darlene to *keep and teach even the least of His commandments* (Matthew 5:19).

As in life, so too now in eternity, she is still giving Christ the preëminence in all things -- an imperative for us all,
of which this present volume speaks with crystal clarity.

Table of Contents

1. [The Purpose of the Book of Numbers \(Numbers 1:1-4\)](#)
2. [The Military Census \(Numbers 1:5-54\)](#)
3. [The Center \(Numbers 2:1-34\)](#)
4. [The Levites \(Numbers 3:1-39\)](#)
5. [The Service of the Levites \(Numbers 4:1-49\)](#)
6. [Purification and Restitution \(Numbers 5:1-10\)](#)
7. [The Trial of Jealousy \(Numbers 5:11-31\)](#)
8. [The Law of the Nazarite \(Numbers 6:1-21\)](#)
9. [Blessing the People \(Numbers 6:22-27\)](#)
10. [The Offering of the Princes \(Numbers 7:1-88\)](#)
11. [The Consecration of the Levites \(Numbers 7:89-8:26\)](#)
12. [The Passover \(Numbers 9:1-14\)](#)
13. [Following the Lord \(Numbers 9:15-23\)](#)
14. [The Trumpets and Warfare \(Numbers 10:1-10\)](#)
15. [From Sinai to Paran \(Numbers 10:11-32\)](#)
16. [Moses's Blessing \(Numbers 10:33-36\)](#)
17. [The Beginning of Complaints \(Numbers 11:1-9\)](#)
18. [Ingratitude \(Numbers 11:1-9\)](#)
19. [Rebellion Against God \(Numbers 11:10-23\)](#)
20. [The Holy Spirit and the Elders of Israel \(Numbers 11:24-30\)](#)
21. [The Plague and the Quail \(Numbers 11:31-35\)](#)
22. [The Demand for Equality \(Numbers 12:1-16\)](#)
23. [The Spies \(Numbers 13:1-33\)](#)
24. [The Cowardice of the People \(Numbers 14:1-25\)](#)
25. [The Judgment on Hypocrisy \(Numbers 14:26-45\)](#)
26. [The Land and the Faith \(Numbers 15:1-21\)](#)
27. [Sins, Unpremeditated and Premeditated \(Numbers 15:22-41\)](#)
28. [The Democratic Rebellion \(Numbers 16:1-35\)](#)
29. [The Culture of Holiness \(Numbers 16:36-40\)](#)
30. [The Culture of Rights \(Numbers 16:41-50\)](#)
31. [Aaron's Rod \(Numbers 17:1-13\)](#)
32. [The Burden of Iniquity \(Numbers 18:1-7\)](#)
33. [Priests and People \(Numbers 18:8-19\)](#)
34. [The Inheritance of the Levites \(Numbers 18:20-24\)](#)
35. [The Levitical Tithe \(Numbers 18:25-32\)](#)
36. [The Meaning of the Red Heifer \(Numbers 19:1-22\)](#)
37. [The Waters of Meribah \(Numbers 20:1-13\)](#)
38. [Edom's Hostility, Aaron's Death \(Numbers 20:14-29\)](#)
39. [The Fiery Serpents \(Numbers 21:1-9\)](#)
40. [Battles \(Numbers 21:10-35\)](#)
41. [Balaam's Ass \(Numbers 22:1-35\)](#)
42. [Balaam and God's Word \(Numbers 22:36-41\)](#)
43. [Balaam's Prophecies \(Numbers 23:1-30\)](#)

44. [The “Star out of Jacob,” Part 1 \(Numbers 24:1-19\)](#)
45. [The “Star out of Jacob,” Part 2 \(Numbers 24:15-19\)](#)
46. [Amalek \(Numbers 24:20-25\)](#)
47. [Phinehas \(Numbers 25:1-18\)](#)
48. [The Second Census \(Numbers 26:1-65\)](#)
49. [The Law of Inheritance \(Numbers 27:1-11\)](#)
50. [Leadership Succession \(Numbers 27:12-23\)](#)
51. [Public Sacrifices \(Numbers 28:1-8\)](#)
52. [Sabbaths, Time, and Focus \(Numbers 28:9-15\)](#)
53. [The Religious Calendar \(Numbers 28:16-31\)](#)
54. [The Feast of Trumpets \(Numbers 29:1-6\)](#)
55. [The Day of Atonement \(Numbers 29:7-11\)](#)
56. [The Feast of Ingathering \(Numbers 29:12-40\)](#)
57. [A Woman’s Vows \(Numbers 30:1-16\)](#)
58. [War Against Midian, Part 1 \(Numbers 31:1-12\)](#)
59. [War Against Midian, Part 2 \(Numbers 31:13-54\)](#)
60. [Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh \(Numbers 32:1-42\)](#)
61. [God’s Promise \(Numbers 33:1-56\)](#)
62. [The Division of the Land \(Numbers 34:1-29\)](#)
63. [Levitical Cities \(Numbers 35:1-8\)](#)
64. [Laws of Murder \(Numbers 35:9-34\)](#)
65. [Inheritance or Succession \(Numbers 36:1-13\)](#)

Chapter One

The Purpose of the Book of Numbers

(*Numbers 1:1-4*)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying,
2. Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls;
3. From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.
4. And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers. (*Numbers 1:1-4*)

The Book of Numbers is clearly not a popular book of the Bible; this obvious fact does not lessen its importance. Most people are not interested in things because they are important but because they please them.

According to Philip J. Budd, Numbers “makes a major contribution” in four areas. *First*, Israel is presented as “a community on the march”; it has an ordained goal, and, to attain that goal, it must learn to depend on God and to give itself to His purposes.

Second, the goal of Israel’s journey is a land. This land is not Israel’s choice but God’s. At one point (*Numbers 14:1-38*), Israel rebels against God’s choice. The fact is, however, that the goal is a very material one, and yet it is inseparable from Israel’s religious or covenantal life. God does not separate the material and the spiritual.

Third, important throughout Numbers is the question of authority. What constitutes legitimate authority and power? What kind of authority makes a community stable?

Fourth, Numbers also deals with “the nature and consequences of the rejection of authority in the community.” These rejections are rebellions against Moses and the God who stands behind Moses.¹ The thirty-eight years in the wilderness which followed were God’s rejection of the people; only the next generation would be allowed to possess the Promised Land. To possess the land is a blessing; it is in fact a culminating blessing. According to *Psalm 37:9-11*,

9. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.
10. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.
11. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

This promise is restated by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matt. 5:5*).

We can add a *fifth* emphasis to Budd's list: the census ordered by God (vv. 2-4). In 1 Chronicles 21, David orders a census, and God judges the nation for it. The purpose of David's census was similar to the census ordered in our text; why, then, was God displeased with it? David's purpose was to assess his military strength in humanistic terms; God's purpose was to bring home to the people that, despite all God's miracles and providential care, they still had to fight for the land. The census was a reminder of their responsibilities.

According to Exodus 30:12 and 38:26, there had been an earlier count of all the men by reckoning the number of half shekels paid when the poll tax was taken. There was thus an accurate count of all the men aged twenty and older, but this reckoning was not in terms of tribes and families; it was only a total of all men. The numbering now is "by their armies," or, by their companies. The census is described as being made by Moses and Aaron, with the help of men representing the tribes.

There is a *sixth* aspect to Numbers which is important. This is one of the books of law, and yet, in any modern sense, there is very little law in Numbers. A book named after a census is still included in the law section. The census has a function comparable to the law: to further God's justice, this was to be done for the defense of the covenant law and people. At one time, in fact during much of the history of the United States, the religious enumeration of American churches and people was very much a part of the U.S. census.

Women and children, and probably aged and dependent men, were not included in the census. The purpose of the census in the Biblical account is not a numerical total but a list of those who can be depended upon to defend the country, exercise authority, and pay *The Purpose of the Book of Numbers* (Numbers 1:1-4) 3 taxes. All others were the beneficiaries of their responsibilities, and also the victims of their failures. As a result of the moral failure of the men of Israel, all had to remain in the wilderness for thirty-eight years more.

Oehler said of this fact of family organization and responsibility:

The *principles* of the Mosaic law of families are the following: — Each family forms a self-contained whole, which, as far as possible, is to be preserved in its integrity. Each Israelite is a citizen of the theocracy only by being a member of a certain clan of the covenant people; hence the value of genealogical trees. The representation of the family descends in the male line, and therefore marriages between the various tribes and families are of course allowed. On the contrary, if the male line had died out, the female line receives independent recognition for the preservation of the family, in order that no family in Israel may perish (a thing which is regarded as a special divine judgment). The separation of family possessions is based on the separation of the families themselves.²

On the husband's death, desertion, or failure to provide or to respect and abide in the covenant (1 Cor. 7:15), the woman then exercised authority. Authority and responsibility are inseparable.

A Scottish commentator, Walter Riggans, has called attention to an important aspect of Scripture that comes through clearly in the opening verses of Numbers. *First*, the initiative always belongs to God. "He is not dependent on our faith to act for us." He is the Lord, and we are His creation. *Second*, our relationship with God is "riveted in history," not in speculation or in man's planning. "The realities of our common world" govern God's plan for us, and God reveals this plan in the history He has created for us.³

This is why the Bible is dull or difficult reading for many people. It is rooted in history, whereas man in his thinking prefers to think non-historically. In history we are born, live, and die; we do not remain to dominate the scene. We do God's ordained work and then pass on. Man rebels against this God-created mutability.

Numbers is an historical book because it is first and last theological. It has a sharp awareness of time. The days of Israel's older generation are numbered, and they are confined to the wilderness. The Promised Land is closed to them because they are closed from God in their foolishness and sin. As a result, there is very little advance: they merely mark time. Their advances are not for their sakes but for the next generation.

Time is thus an important aspect of Numbers. It should not surprise us that Moses, in Psalm 90, speaks of God's providence, the fragile nature of human life, and the brevity of time. The psalm is a prayer on the subject. Life is brief and uncertain, and to spend it in indifference to or rebellion against God is to live under wrath instead of under blessing. There must be, instead of waywardness, a full submission to God. Psalm 90 echoes Deuteronomy, and it fits the events of Numbers. This psalm was placed, perhaps by Ezra, at the beginning of the fourth section or book of psalms; this may or may not coincide with the fact that Numbers is the fourth book of Moses. Alexander said of this psalm, "It may...be regarded as the heart or centre of the whole collection and indeed as the model upon which even David, 'the sweet psalmist of Israel' (2 Sam. xxiii.i), formed that glorious body of psalmodic literature," the Book of Psalms.⁴

Although Numbers gives us an account of the chosen people which makes it clear that there was in them no good thing, the stress is not on Israel's sin and foolishness but on God's holiness. This continues the emphasis of Leviticus, that God is holy, and therefore His people must be holy. Numbers depicts with sharp clarity the stupidity and evil of man's self-will, and the patience and holiness of God the King.

The census makes it clear that God's ordained form of society is patriarchal. The myth of an "original" matriarchy in human society is the product of cultural and biological evolutionary theories. During the nineteenth century and into the 1920s of the twentieth century, such thinking was especially common. In reality, matriarchies represent moral and cultural decay. Where the parentage of a child is not certain because of a general promiscuity, there the male role in the family diminishes. There is a relationship also between feminism and matriarchal theorizing.

Chapter Two

The Military Census

(Numbers 1:5-54)

5. And these are the names of the men that shall stand with you: of the tribe of Reuben; Elizur the son of Shedeur.
6. Of Simeon; Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.
7. Of Judah; Nahshon the son of Amminadab.
8. Of Issachar; Nethaneel the son of Zuar.
9. Of Zebulun; Eliab the son of Helon.
10. Of the children of Joseph: of Ephraim; Elishama the son of Ammihud: of Manasseh; Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.
11. Of Benjamin; Abidan the son of Gideoni.
12. Of Dan; Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.
13. Of Asher; Pagiel the son of Ocran.
14. Of Gad; Eliasaph the son of Deuel.
15. Of Naphtali; Ahira the son of Enan.
16. These were the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel.
17. And Moses and Aaron took these men which are expressed by their names:
18. And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month, and they declared their pedigrees after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, by their polls.
19. As the LORD commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai.
20. And the children of Reuben, Israel's eldest son, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
21. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Reuben, were forty and six thousand and five hundred.
22. Of the children of Simeon, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, those that were numbered of them, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
23. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Simeon, were fifty and nine thousand and three hundred.
24. Of the children of Gad, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
25. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Gad, were forty and five thousand six hundred and fifty.

26. Of the children of Judah, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
27. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Judah, were threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred.
28. Of the children of Issachar, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
29. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Issachar, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred.
30. Of the children of Zebulun, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
31. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Zebulun, were fifty and seven thousand and four hundred.
32. Of the children of Joseph, namely, of the children of Ephraim, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
33. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Ephraim, were forty thousand and five hundred.
34. Of the children of Manasseh, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
35. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Manasseh, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred.
36. Of the children of Benjamin, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
37. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Benjamin, were thirty and five thousand and four hundred.
38. Of the children of Dan, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
39. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Dan, were threescore and two thousand and seven hundred.
40. Of the children of Asher, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
41. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Asher, were forty and one thousand and five hundred.
42. Of the children of Naphtali, throughout their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war;
43. Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Naphtali, were fifty and three thousand and four hundred.

44. These are those that were numbered, which Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: each one was for the house of his fathers.
 45. So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel;
 46. Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.
 47. But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them.
 48. For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying,
 49. Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel:
 50. But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle.
 51. And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.
 52. And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts.
 53. But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony.
 54. And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they. (Numbers 1:5-54)

In vv. 4-19, the fact of the census is cited, and the representatives of each of the twelve tribes (Levi not being counted) are named in vv. 5-15. In vv. 20-46, we are given the results of the census: there are 603,550 fighting men (v. 46). This is similar to the results cited in Exodus 38:26; this number came from all the men twenty years old and upward who paid the half-shekel head tax. Almost forty years later, another census gave a total slightly lower, 601,730; there were, however, great variations in the tribal count in this later census. In vv. 47-54, the work of the Levites is cited.

Verse 2 can be translated, instead of as “tribes,” or “families” in the Authorized Version, as *clans*. It is a census of “all that are able to go forth to war in Israel” (v. 3), or, all who are eligible for military service. This indicates that the aged and the crippled were not counted.

Since God was the King of His covenant people, a census was exclusively His privilege and for His purposes. A census was thus a religious fact. At one point in time, the U.S. Census was a careful account of the religious faith of the people, of the various religious bodies, including denominations of less than one hundred people, and it was a record also of the histories, doctrines, and activities of each. After World War II, this kind of census ended.

There are a number of important aspects to this census. *First*, it is a census of the strength of the tribes or clans, not of Israel as a monolithic unit. Military action was normally by tribal or clan

action under the command of a central authority. Hebrew documents give the cutoff age for able-bodied men as sixty.

Some of history's most effective armies have been those where a strong clan loyalty has existed, as among the Scots and the Welsh. The power of a common purpose, united with a strong blood bond, has been important. The emphasis on loyalty to the central state power is a modern emphasis. Revolutionary France replaced the historic regions of France with artificially created departments. In the United States, efforts are under way to replace the states with ten federal districts. Natural loyalties are replaced with state-created ones.

The head tax of Exodus 38:26 indicated the number of able-bodied males in Israel. The purpose of this census was to establish the tribal or clan militias. God honored the clan loyalties and made them basic to Israel's military action.

In the twentieth century, as both the purposes of war and the constituency of armies have grown more abstract, the willingness of men to fight has accordingly decreased. A depersonalized army is thus vulnerable; not surprisingly, highly personal guerrilla forces have an intense personal dedication.

Second, the census made it clear that Israel was an army on the march from slavery to freedom, from the wilderness to the Promised Land. Whereas at the beginning God had saved them miraculously, the time now had come for them to battle for their inheritance. They were not going to be raptured into the Promised Land. God's empowering grace was the preparation for warfare, not for inaction. In his hymn, "Am I a Soldier of the Cross," Isaac Watts (1724) ably depicted the expectations of false faith:

Must I be carried to the skies
On flow'r'y beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas?

Salvation required Israel to be future oriented. They could not rest contented with the wilderness. Our ideas of the wilderness years are governed by our knowledge of what Arabia is now, and they are thus unrealistic. It was once a forested land with many streams, under-populated, and well able to contain Israel on the march. Life was not too unpleasant; there was grazing for all their herds. To remain content with the wilderness was no doubt a real temptation to some, even as a return to Egypt was to others. The covenant Lord, however, required that they look ahead to the Promised Land, *and* to growth in the covenant law and life in that land.

Third, the names of some of the clan leaders indicate that some kind of religious motivation was present, because the names reflect the covenant and God. Thus, in v. 6, Shelumiel means "at peace with God," or, "my friend is God." Amminadab (v. 7) means "God hath given." Eliab is "God is Father." Elishama means "God hath heard" (v. 10); Ammihud, "the divine Kinsman is glorious"; Gamaliel, "God is my reward"; and Pedahzur, "the Rock hath redeemed." Abidan means "the Father hath judged" (v. 11). Ahiezer is "the divine Brother is a help," and Ammishaddai, "the people of Shaddai" (v. 12). Pagiel means "the lot of fate of (i.e., given by)

God” (v. 13). Eliasaph is “God hath added,” and Deuel or Reuel (v. 14) is “God is a friend”; the name is a shortened form of Daruel. Ahira means “the divine Brother is a friend” (v. 15). However, Nahshon (v. 7) means serpent.⁵ While the religious names were no guarantee of faith, they do indicate that to some degree the covenant governed the people’s thinking.

Fourth, in v. 16, the clan leaders listed in vv. 5-15 are called the “heads of thousands in Israel.” These twelve men were heads of family groups of a thousand; the *thousand* was a subgroup within the tribe or clan. All such clan leaders were responsible for all families under their rule; allegiance to the law and the focus of authority on the tribal level rested with these men. Under them were the hundred, and the existence of hundred courts is well-documented in English history, and they existed in the American colonies. This meant decentralization and an emphasis on family and local authority. While this was no insurance against faithlessness, it did ensure particular strength in times of faith.

Fifth, Levi was not included in the census and the militia because priority remained in the maintenance of the Center. In the modern world, the core of the educational curriculum is no longer Scripture but the liberal arts. How artificial the modern view of the liberal arts is came clearly into view with World War II; it was quickly regarded as the least important aspect of the university’s curriculum and was treated accordingly. This Levitical exemption from the military census is the legal basis for the continuing exemption of the clergy from military draft.

Sixth, the tribes were to encamp around the sanctuary, “every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard” (v. 52). There were thus four standards, one for each direction, north, south, east, and west, and three tribes on each side. The four standards were those of Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, and Dan. The Levites were around the sanctuary, “that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children Israel” (v. 53). The other tribes were to protect the people as a whole; the Levites had to protect the sanctuary. Any profane trespass against the sanctuary was punishable by death (v. 51); no law gives any human agency this power, and, according to one Jewish tradition, “God rather than a human court would look to the punishment.”⁶

Seventh, the census was for the twelve tribes, and the results were:

Reuben	46,500	Simeon	59,300
Gad	46,650	Judah	74,600
Issachar	54,400	Zebulun	57,400
Ephraim	40,500	Manasseh	32,200
Benjamin	35,400	Dan	62,700
Asher	41,500	Naphthali	53,400
		Total:	603,550

In the New Testament, our Lord calls twelve disciples to replace the twelve tribes. This fact is seldom taken seriously. We are too much influenced by the Roman imperial centralizing pattern, whereas the Biblical standard is unity, not union. This does not mean a toleration of false theologies, but it does militate against a false ecumenism which seeks to centralize all church authorities. Man’s attempts to centralize authority have as their presupposition a belief that a full

awareness of the nature of truth and authority rests in the man-created center. This is a dangerous illusion.

The decentralized nature of the military power as God ordained it provided a veto by the clans or tribes on any unilateral military action by the central power. Applied to the present, this would mean that the military power in the main would be made up of state militias and state guards rather than a federal, national army. This would be a severe restriction on rash or aggressive action, in that a navy alone could not wage war. Such decentralization is no certain insurance against rash warfare, but it would be a major brake against such action.

Chapter Three

The Center

(Numbers 2:1-34)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,
2. Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch.
3. And on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies: and Nahshon the son of Amminadab shall be captain of the children of Judah.
4. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were threescore and fourteen thousand and six hundred.
5. And those that do pitch next unto him shall be the tribe of Issachar: and Nethaneel the son of Zuar shall be captain of the children of Issachar.
6. And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, were fifty and four thousand and four hundred.
7. Then the tribe of Zebulun: and Eliab the son of Helon shall be captain of the children of Zebulun.
8. And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, were fifty and seven thousand and four hundred.
9. All that were numbered in the camp of Judah were an hundred thousand and fourscore thousand and six thousand and four hundred, throughout their armies. These shall first set forth.
10. On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben according to their armies: and the captain of the children of Reuben shall be Elizur the son of Shedeur.
11. And his host, and those that were numbered thereof, were forty and six thousand and five hundred.
12. And those which pitch by him shall be the tribe of Simeon: and the captain of the children of Simeon shall be Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.
13. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were fifty and nine thousand and three hundred.
14. Then the tribe of Gad: and the captain of the sons of Gad shall be Eliasaph the son of Reuel.
15. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were forty and five thousand and six hundred and fifty.
16. All that were numbered in the camp of Reuben were an hundred thousand and fifty and one thousand and four hundred and fifty, throughout their armies. And they shall set forth in the second rank.
17. Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: as they encamp, so shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards.

18. On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim according to their armies: and the captain of the sons of Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud.
19. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were forty thousand and five hundred.
20. And by him shall be the tribe of Manasseh: and the captain of the children of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.
21. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred.
22. Then the tribe of Benjamin: and the captain of the sons of Benjamin shall be Abidan the son of Gideon.
23. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were thirty and five thousand and four hundred.
24. All that were numbered of the camp of Ephraim were an hundred thousand and eight thousand and an hundred, throughout their armies. And they shall go forward in the third rank.
25. The standard of the camp of Dan shall be on the north side by their armies: and the captain of the children of Dan shall be Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.
26. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were threescore and two thousand and seven hundred.
27. And those that encamp by him shall be the tribe of Asher: and the captain of the children of Asher shall be Pagiel the son of Ocran.
28. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were forty and one thousand and five hundred.
29. Then the tribe of Naphtali: and the captain of the children of Naphtali shall be Ahira the son of Enan.
30. And his host, and those that were numbered of them, were fifty and three thousand and four hundred.
31. All they that were numbered in the camp of Dan were an hundred thousand and fifty and seven thousand and six hundred. They shall go hindmost with their standards.
32. These are those which were numbered of the children of Israel by the house of their fathers: all those that were numbered of the camps throughout their hosts were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.
33. But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses.
34. And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses: so they pitched by their standards, and so they set forward, every one after their families, according to the house of their fathers. (Numbers 2:1-34)

Numbers 2 gives us the arrangement of the tribes of Israel around the sanctuary. The Levites and priests, as Numbers 3 tells us, surrounded the tabernacle, or royal dwelling on the march, when it was erected. Numbers 2 gives us the location of the twelve tribes outside the immediate area of the sanctuary and the priestly and Levitical encampment.

The formation is that of a square. In antiquity, the royal tent of an army on the march was commonly in the center of the square.

Because modern man affirms a universal origination in and creation by chance, meanings are often difficult for him to grasp. His data-based perspective is not always congenial to a governing meaning.

Cities over the centuries have been religious facts. The center of the city was the location for the temple, or the royal palace, whichever was central to the society. Everything else was around the central square, or the center, both protecting it and deriving its protection from the center. The concept of the center is essential to an understanding of society. At one time, the closer one was to the center, the greater the power and the protection. To be “in the city” means status.

The suburbs were originally an area outside the city walls and hence unprotected and sometimes without legal status. The rise of modern suburbia goes hand in hand with the decay of the center. When the center decays, or a false center arises, the protection afforded by the center gives way to a high vulnerability. Then the suburbs become attractive, because to distance oneself from the center becomes an advantage. Economically, the suburb remains dependent upon the city, while in terms of peace and security, the city becomes an increasing liability. When this happens, it is because the city fosters and exports not faith, law, order, peace, and security, but rather lawlessness, disorder, and death itself.

The center then “does not hold.” Because it has lost its meaning, it exports disintegration and decay. It walls in death for its people because it can no longer provide the core of meaning and purpose necessary for community. The godly community is replaced by a criminal community. Christianity no longer provides the center nor the basis of community for the city. As a result, criminal gangs become, by means of violence and terror, the cohesive force. The same is true of young gangs: they dominate vast areas of the modern city. Narcotics, prostitution, theft, and murder become a way of life in the city.

Where there is a false center, there will be false laws. Where the throne of a society is evil, and is motivated by iniquity, it will, as Psalm 94:20 tells us, frame “mischief by a law.” The “rights” of criminals will be strictly guarded, but their innocent victims will go unprotected and without restitution.

In such a society, the center, being evil, furthers evil. Two motives now govern men. One is egocentrism, whereby the individual judges all things by himself. In terms of Genesis 3:5, he sees himself as a god, empowered to judge and determine what is good and evil in terms of himself. The other motive is group centrism: the criterion for judgment becomes one’s social, racial, or special interest group. In either case, no higher law is seen as binding on all. The political process then becomes a clash of false and petty centers, all determined to destroy the totality if their will is not done.

This false centralization is often limited to a false pluralism which denies the validity of a God-given center in favor of a multiverse of entirely relative meanings. Each then is in radical warfare against all others. No overarching order of meanings governs the pluralities.

The tabernacle as the center of the encampment is very important to an understanding of the New Testament. In John 1:14, we are told:

And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The word translated as “dwelt” is the Greek *iskenosen*, tabernacled or tented. In Revelation 21:3, we have the nominative form of the same word, *skene*, and also *dwelt*, *skenosei*:

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

Jesus Christ is the tabernacling Presence of God. He must be the center of the social order. Although our Lord also refers to Himself as the Temple of God (e.g., John 2:19-22), the tent-palace, suggesting an army on the march, is the basic image. Moreover, as Burch pointed out some years ago, our Lord deliberately set aside the false, human centers. In John 4, in talking to the woman of Samaria, our Lord confronts the humanistic doctrines of the center, Jerusalem versus Samaria or Gerizim in the Jewish-Samaritan controversy. According to Burch,

Gerizim, like Jerusalem, was once a famous “Centre” of the earth. The woman refers to that fact (Jn. 4:20). Jesus’ answer to her, that neither in this mountain nor in that of Jerusalem shall men worship, shows that He is aware of the “Centre” concept. His revelation will sweep both away.⁷

Burch, writing from an anthropological perspective, called attention to Revelation 14:4, which speaks of those undefiled by women, who are virgins and follow the Lamb of God; these are contrasted with the nations who follow Babylon the great and will consequently fall with her. These virgins are contrasted with all who commit *fornication* with the nations and Babylon (see Rev. 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2). Thus, reference to *fornication* is to living in terms of a false center, whereas *virginity* here refers to faithfulness to the true center, Jesus Christ.⁸

Jesus Christ is the true tabernacle and center. All true worshippers of God will make Him the center of every aspect of life and thought. Throughout Scripture, the New Jerusalem, or Zion, Jesus Christ and His law-word, is basic to all of life. As Roderick Campbell observed,

Consequently, a definition which will fit perfectly almost every occurrence of the word “Zion” as used in the Psalms, in Old Testament Prophecy, and every occurrence in the New Testament, must read somewhat as follows: *Where there exists a covenanted community, corporate body, or society, in which Jehovah’s (or Christ’s) presence as Redeemer and King is recognized, His power experienced, and His revealed will obeyed, there is Zion.*⁹

Revelation gives us the struggle between the false center, Babylon, and the true center, the New Jerusalem, Jesus Christ and His new humanity. Citing Campbell again,

John sees an entire city coming down out of heaven to earth. He is witnessing two things at once. He is seeing the Divine pattern for all human relationships, a Heaven planned civilization (the ideal New Covenant community) in all its varied activities; and he is seeing, in prophetic vision, the fulfillment of the same glorious ideal.¹⁰

There is a word which appears repeatedly in the accounts of the construction of the tabernacle: *foursquare* (Ex. 27:1; 28:16; 30:2; 37:25; 38:1; 39:9); it also appears in Ezekiel's account (Ezek. 40:47; 48:20). In Revelation 21:16, the New Jerusalem is also described as *foursquare*.

Many cities of antiquity were deliberately and carefully built to be foursquare: Babylon and Ninevah are well known examples.¹¹ The cube was a symbol of perfection, and the perfection of Christ's tabernacling presence is in community, one founded by Him and grounded on His atonement and law-word.

In recent years there has been a new center for many. The church has in the recent past been replaced by the state centers (courts, legislative and bureaucratic buildings) and banks. Now the large shopping malls are attracting large crowds, some shoppers, others sight-seers. Youths in particular are drawn to such places as a center for promenade, flirtation, and hooliganism.

Chapter Four

The Levites

(Numbers 3:1-39)

1. These also are the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that the LORD spake with Moses in mount Sinai.
2. And these are the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.
3. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office.
4. And Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children: and Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the sight of Aaron their father.
5. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
6. Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him.
7. And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.
8. And they shall keep all the instruments of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle.
9. And thou shalt give the Levites unto Aaron and to his sons: they are wholly given unto him out of the children of Israel.
10. And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.
11. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
12. And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine;
13. Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD.
14. And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,
15. Number the children of Levi after the house of their fathers, by their families: every male from a month old and upward shalt thou number them.
16. And Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.
17. And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari.
18. And these are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families; Libni, and Shimei.
19. And the sons of Kohath by their families; Amram, and Izebar, Hebron, and Uzziel.
20. And the sons of Merari by their families; Mahli, and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to the house of their fathers.

21. Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimites: these are the families of the Gershonites.

22. Those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, even those that were numbered of them were seven thousand and five hundred.

23. The families of the Gershonites shall pitch behind the tabernacle westward.

24. And the chief of the house of the father of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph the son of Lael.

25. And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,

26. And the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it for all the service thereof.

27. And of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izecharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the Kohathites.

28. In the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were eight thousand and six hundred, keeping the charge of the sanctuary.

29. The families of the sons of Kohath shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle southward.

30. And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel.

31. And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof.

32. And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be chief over the chief of the Levites, and have the oversight of them that keep the charge of the sanctuary.

33. Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites: these are the families of Merari.

34. And those that were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were six thousand and two hundred.

35. And the chief of the house of the father of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail: these shall pitch on the side of the tabernacle northward.

36. And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto,

37. And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.

38. But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

39. All that were numbered of the Levites, which Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, throughout their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty and two thousand. (Numbers 3:1-39)

We have in these verses the census of the Levites. There was a religious reason of particular importance at stake. The law of the firstborn required that a substitute be given for all males in the twelve tribes.

In vv. 11-13 we are told that the Levites belong to God in a particular way. All peoples are His creation, and all are required to serve Him or be judged. The Levites, however, have a special status. God smote all the firstborn of Egypt; at the same time, He hallowed unto Himself all the firstborn of Israel, both of men and of animals. Instead of a like judgment of death on Israel, God took their firstborn for His service. All are God's property, but Levi, as the vicarious firstborn for all, represented the sentence of death and the deliverance of the atonement by the Passover Lamb. The tribe of Levi thus had charge of the sanctuary and the sacrifices: the sphere of atonement and its ministry was under their jurisdiction.

Then, vv. 14-39, we have the Levitical census. Earlier, in vv. 2-4, we have the family of Aaron listed, the priestly tribe. The sacrifices were more strictly their jurisdiction, while all other Levites had various responsibilities to the sanctuary and to God's people. In vv. 5-10, the duties of the Levites in the wilderness are cited. Two in particular are specified here: *first*, the care and moving and erecting of the sanctuary is their duty. *Second*, the sanctuary must be guarded, and all unauthorized persons, trespassers, are to be put to death. Especially at this point, curiosity about the sanctuary made necessary a strong emphasis on the penalty. After the golden calf episode, the Levites, because of their faithfulness, became the firstborn among Israel's tribes. Very clearly, here and elsewhere in Scripture, status as the firstborn is a matter of privilege and grace. Moral failure, as with Reuben, could lead to demotion. In European society, primogeniture became a legal premise: first birth meant inheritance. In the Bible, moral qualification takes priority over a biological priority. Thus, *disinheritance* is an important Biblical doctrine. The fallacy of premillennialism begins with the belief that Israel could not be disinherited by God, whereas Scripture makes it clear that not only were the twelve tribes replaced by the twelve apostles to form the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), but that the churches also can be judged and set aside (1 Peter 4:17; Rev. 2:16; 3:16).

In vv. 11-13, we are reminded that all the firstborn belong to God. Since the firstborn represent the totality, this means that all people belong to God, and we are all accountable to Him for what we do with His property, ourselves and this world. This is a priestly responsibility, hence the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. In Romans 15:16, Paul speaks of himself as a "minister of Jesus Christ, ministering the gospel of God." The word translated as *minister*, and again as *ministering*, is in the Greek *leitourgos*, and *hierourgounta*, priestly ministry or administration. Paul, while neither a Levite nor a descendant of Aaron, declares himself a priest of Jesus Christ.

In vv. 14-39, we have the enumeration of the subclans of Levi named after his three sons, the Merarites, the Gershonites, and the Kohathites. The encampment had these families around the sanctuary in this fashion. (*See diagram.*)

Whereas the twelve tribes or clans numbered men in terms of their eligibility to fight, the numbering of the Levites was different. In v. 15 we are told, "every male from a month old and upward shalt thou number them." From their earliest days, the young Levites were set apart for

service to the sanctuary. Specific services were assigned to each of the three subclans of the Levites (4:15; 7:9).

Asher

DAN

Naphthali

(North)

Benjamin

Merarites

Issachar

EPHRAIM

(West)

Gershonites

Sanctuary

Aaron's Sons

(East)

JUDAH

Manasseh

Kohathites

Zebulun

(South)

Gad

REUBEN

Simeon

The location of the three subclans of the Levites, and the fourth, the line of Aaron, around the sanctuary, had as its purpose a fact ably stated by F.W. Grant:

The separation of the Levites to God for the work of the tabernacle is now declared. They are to be the body-guard of the divine King, and as the priests go in to God to perform their intercessory service in behalf of the people, so the Levites keep them from the wrath that would follow the intrusion of the stranger into the tabernacle of God, the holy things of which they bear through the desert in all their journeyings.¹²

This is an important fact that men tend to forget, namely, that the tabernacle, later the Temple, and now the church must be seen as the palace of the Great King, God the Creator. It must be protected from profanation, and it must be treated as a royal place. The clergy now are to be, as the priests and Levites were then, a royal guard to prevent profanation and sacrilege. When priests and pastors are themselves the source of profanation, a people are far gone, and judgment comes upon all. This is why the Levites are described in v. 9 as “wholly given” to Aaron for the temple service. Theirs must be a complete surrender to their calling and to the defense of the royal house against profanation.

The prescriptive nature of these verses is troublesome to the modern mind; we are accustomed to thinking that there is merit to a lack of order, and rules are often seen as burdens. However, as Joseph Parker commented,

Order is but another word for purpose, or another word for mind. This mechanism was not self-invented or self-regulated; behind this military table of position and movement is the God of the whole universe. He is behind everything.¹³

For the modern mind, disorder and revolution spell freedom. As a result, whether it is in art, education, politics, religion, or any other sphere, revolutionary movements are encouraged and order is treated as an imposition.

The significance of the Levites as a type is very great. They are given to us as the tribe or clan of the firstborn of Israel; as such, they represent the totality. There is a very important reference to this in Hebrews 12:23, which speaks of Christ’s congregation as “the general assembly and church of the firstborn.” The firstborn of Egypt were all anathema to God and died; they represented His verdict on the world of covenant-breakers. Jesus Christ, as God’s firstborn and only-begotten Son, died in the place of His people, His new humanity, to free them from Egypt, the fallen humanity and its realm.

In v. 39, we are told that the total number of Levites was 22,000; this number included all who were one month of age and older. We are not told why the Levites were numerically so much smaller than the other tribes. Perhaps the reason for this lay back in Egypt, in some harsher oppression of the Levites and their children.

In v. 1, the word *generations* means in Hebrew the family records or history of those involved. The word has the same meaning in Genesis. Thus, Genesis is, and portions of other books are, family records compiled by the persons mentioned, here Aaron and Moses.

Family records thus have an important place in the Bible. Genealogical tables are regularly given, not only for the covenant people but at times for others as well. At present, any concern with genealogy is considered pretentious and is often ridiculed. While it is true that many approach their own genealogy with self-exalting hopes, the concern is basically a sound one. The family is basic to Christianity and its civilization, and the present indifference to one's ancestors is part of a belief that the individual is everything. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 4:7 have a general application:

For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Our family heritage should move us to both humility and gratitude.¹⁴

Chapter Five

The Service of the Levites

(Numbers 4:1-49)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,
2. Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers,
3. From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.
4. This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things:
5. And when the camp setteth forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering veil, and cover the ark of testimony with it:
6. And shall put thereon the covering of badgers' skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof.
7. And upon the table of shewbread they shall spread a cloth of blue, and put thereon the dishes, and the spoons, and the bowls, and covers to cover withal: and the continual bread shall be thereon:
8. And they shall spread upon them a cloth of scarlet, and cover the same with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put in the staves thereof.
9. And they shall take a cloth of blue, and cover the candlestick of the light, and his lamps, and his tongs, and his snuffdishes, and all the oil vessels thereof, wherewith they minister unto it:
10. And they shall put it and all the vessels thereof within a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put it upon a bar.
11. And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof:
12. And they shall take all the instruments of ministry, wherewith they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a cloth of blue, and cover them with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put them on a bar:
13. And they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon:
14. And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the basons, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers' skins, and put to the staves of it.
15. And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation.
16. And to the office of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest pertaineth the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, and the daily meat offering, and the anointing oil, and the oversight of all the tabernacle, and of all that therein is, in the sanctuary, and in the vessels thereof.

17. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,
18. Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites:
19. But thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them every one to his service and to his burden:
20. But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.
21. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
22. Take also the sum of the sons of Gershon, throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families;
23. From thirty years old and upward until fifty years old shalt thou number them; all that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.
24. This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, to serve, and for burdens:
25. And they shall bear the curtains of the tabernacle, and the tabernacle of the congregation, his covering, and the covering of the badgers' skins that is above upon it, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation,
26. And the hangings of the court, and the hanging for the door of the gate of the court, which is by the tabernacle and by the altar round about, and their cords, and all the instruments of their service, and all that is made for them: so shall they serve.
27. At the appointment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burdens, and in all their service: and ye shall appoint unto them in charge all their burdens.
28. This is the service of the families of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation: and their charge shall be under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.
29. As for the sons of Merari, thou shalt number them after their families, by the house of their fathers;
30. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old shalt thou number them, every one that entereth into the service, to do the work of the tabernacle of the congregation.
31. And this is the charge of their burden, according to all their service in the tabernacle of the congregation; the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and sockets thereof,
32. And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their instruments, and with all their service: and by name ye shall reckon the instruments of the charge of their burden.
33. This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the tabernacle of the congregation, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.
34. And Moses and Aaron and the chief of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites after their families, and after the house of their fathers,
35. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation:

36. And those that were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty.

37. These were they that were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, which Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

38. And those that were numbered of the sons of Gershon, throughout their families, and by the house of their fathers,

39. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation,

40. Even those that were numbered of them, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty.

41. These are they that were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, of all that might do service in the tabernacle of the congregation, whom Moses and Aaron did number according to the commandment of the LORD.

42. And those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, throughout their families, by the house of their fathers,

43. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that entereth into the service, for the work in the tabernacle of the congregation,

44. Even those that were numbered of them after their families, were three thousand and two hundred.

45. These be those that were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

46. All those that were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the chief of Israel numbered, after their families, and after the house of their fathers,

47. From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation,

48. Even those that were numbered of them, were eight thousand and five hundred and fourscore.

49. According to the commandment of the LORD they were numbered by the hand of Moses, every one according to his service, and according to his burden: thus were they numbered of him, as the LORD commanded Moses. (Numbers 4:1-49)

The census of the Levites in v. 3 is said to be inclusive of all between the ages of thirty and fifty. In Numbers 8:23-26, we are told that the years of Levitical service are twenty-five to fifty; after fifty, the Levite must withdraw from active service *in the tent of meeting*; he may assist in the sanctuary duties, but any active service now lies elsewhere. In 1 Chronicles 23:3 and 24, we have a still different reading; the Levites were registered in the enumeration from age thirty up according to v. 3, and in v. 24, from twenty years upward.

This census is a second numbering of the Levites, this time by families, using data perhaps acquired by each subclan in the first enumeration. The ages cited are not contradictory: they have to do with the *sanctuary* service. At twenty, a male Levite became eligible for sanctuary service,

and for training. At twenty-five, he apparently assisted, as he did after fifty. This discipline served to prepare the Levite for mature service to the community at large after the age of fifty.

The word *service* in Numbers 4:3 is in Hebrew literally *warfare*. This was an enumeration as part of a military census. The Levites could not be drafted for military action because they were already members of an army engaged in warfare for God. There is conflict in every sphere of life, but nowhere is the warfare more direct and intense than in God's service. Whenever a man enters such a service, conflict is inescapable if he is faithful. Men in armies of state are occasionally involved in battle. However, anyone whose work is in the sphere of setting forth the implications of the faith is faced with continual battle. We cannot limit this warfare to the church and its ministry. Many other spheres are equally Levitical. Thus, all faithful Christian scholarship is constantly engaged in a confrontation with the forces of anti-Christianity. Our English words, *serve* and *service*, still have as one of their meanings "military action."

S. T. Coleridge wrote of the need for a well-educated class, whom he called a *clerisy*, to act in some sense as the Levites of old. The fallacy of his position was that intellectuals have been anything but a clerisy protecting society. Every community needs protection. An army as such may be well armed but may have no understanding of what it must defend nor why it must do so. The need is for Christian scholarship to provide that defense and the armament of mind and faith. This is the implication of the military census of the Levites.

In Deuteronomy 10:8-9, Moses tells Israel what the function of the Levites is:

8. At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day.
9. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him.

The Levitical duties of the Levites are here cited. They are, *first*, "to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD." This meant literally to transport, carry, and protect the ark and other things of the sanctuary. It meant, moreover, in a figurative sense, that the defense of the faith rested with the Levite. *Second*, the Levite was "to stand before the Lord to minister unto him." This did not mean the conduction of the service of worship, which was a priestly, not a Levitical, duty. The Levite could stand before the Lord anywhere to minister to Him, even as the modern Levite, the instructor or scholar, can serve God in areas outside the liturgical sphere. *Third*, the Levite was "to bless in his name," i.e., God's name. God's blessing is His mercy, favor, peace, and gifts to His covenant people. By his work, the Christian Levite is a means of transmitting God's blessing to His people. He instructs and guides God's people into the pathways of truth and justice.

The Levite receives no inheritance like other men. "The LORD is his inheritance."

The duties of the Levites *in the wilderness journey* are set forth in this chapter. *First*, in vv. 1-20, we have the census of the sons of Kohath, and then their duties are specified. Both Moses and Aaron were Kohathites, although Aaron was separated to form a priestly subclan. Some of the inmost and most holy furnishings were under their care. *Second*, in vv. 21-28, the Gershonite

subclan was given charge of the curtains of the tabernacle and the court. Then, *third*, the Merarite subclan was given charge of the framework of the tabernacle. Moreover, v. 32 tells us that the assigned duties were not general but specific: each man was to be assigned by name what he should carry. This meaning is set forth more clearly by some recent translations.

The reference in v. 7 to “the table of the shewbread” is to “the table of the Presence” or “the table of the Face,” the Face of God. In the service of communion, we are confronted with the Presence or “Face” of God, His communion with us and His favor to us.

There is an interesting color scheme to the coverings or wrappings of the furnishings when transported. The most holy items, including the ark, were wrapped with various things, but the outer covering of the ark was a blue cloth, the color of the sky or heaven. Other items from the most holy areas were wrapped with a covering of blue cloth or scarlet and then an outer goatskin covering everything (vv. 7-12).

Other items had a purple cloth, the color of royalty, as their inner wrapping, and then a goatskin cover. The curtains of the Holy of holies were blue, and those of the holy place were purple. Kings of that era and later wore blue and purple garments (Ezek. 23:6; Judges 8:26).

According to vv. 17-20, the priests were required first of all to cover all things in the Holy of Holies *before* the Kohathites entered to transport them. Although the Kohathites carried the ark, they could not see it uncovered. The penalty for this rule, if violated, was death. There could be no presumptuous familiarity with holy things. The penalty is reserved to God’s administration. The interesting fact here is that *the priests* are told, “Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of Kohathites from among the Levites” (v. 18). The reverential conduct must begin with the priests. The higher the authority in a society, the more necessary a conduct marked by reverence and awe becomes. Authority is not a trifling matter. It is *delegated* power, and God, who delegates all earthly powers among men, will not hold men guiltless if they treat it lightly.

This census of the able-bodied Levites, ages thirty to fifty, gave the following results: the Kohathites were 2,750 (v. 36); the Gershonites numbered 2,630 (v. 40); and the Merarites were 3,200 (v. 44) strong; this gave a total of 8,580 (v. 48). The requirement that all be of age and without blemish was a strict one. The figures as given in Numbers 3 as against Numbers 4 tell the story:

Kohathites:	8,600	2,750
Gershonites:	7,500	2,630
Merarites:	6,200	3,200

The figures in gross numbers give the young, the blemished, and the elderly as well as the fit aged thirty to fifty.

Numbers 1 and 2 give us the census for the twelve tribes or clans, whereas Numbers 3 and 4 concentrate on the Levites. There is, thus, in this military census, a higher and heavier emphasis on the necessity of the Levites for the protection of the covenant people. At the center of all things is the sanctuary, the faith, the covenant. Around this center is the core group, upon whose obedience and faithfulness the life of the covenant people depends.

Greco-Roman thinking, as well as modern thought, reduces everything to abstraction and then elevates a group of self-appointed philosopher-kings as the sole guardians of this abstract truth. Biblical thinking requires the entire community to center itself on the sanctuary, the covenant faith. It is not abstract but specific, and it speaks to every man. The Christian scholar has defected to the enemy if he forgets his duty to speak to the people of God, to all who will listen with hearing ears. His is not an ivory tower calling but the forefront of the battle of the Lord.

Chapter Six

Purification and Restitution

(*Numbers 5:1-10*)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead:
3. Both male and female shall ye put out, without the camp shall ye put them; that they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I dwell.
4. And the children of Israel did so, and put them out without the camp: as the LORD spake unto Moses, so did the children of Israel.
5. And the LORD spake unto Moses saying,
6. Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty;
7. Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed.
8. But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him.
9. And every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring unto the priest, shall be his.
10. And every man's hallowed things shall be his: whatsoever any man giveth the priest, it shall be his. (*Numbers 5:1-10*)

In vv. 1-4, we have an essential aspect of God's law, *quarantine*. The requirement for moral and physical purity is a religious matter because God, having created all things very good (Gen. 1:31), requires fallen man to work for the restoration of that original purity. The purpose of laws of quarantine is the protection of society, to keep it *clean*. The Hebrew words for *clean* are several, but the basic one means clear, uncontaminated, sound, innocent, unadulterated, and holy. We tend to think of physical cleanliness on the one hand, and moral cleanliness on the other. In God's law, the two are one, and man has an obligation to be pure before God in all his being. He must be *clean*. Three kinds of uncleanness are specified in v. 2: *first*, there were the lepers. This word in Scripture encompasses a variety of infectious diseases, including Hansen's disease, known also to us as modern leprosy. *Second*, all those with a contagious discharge were to be quarantined. *Third*, also included were all who were "defiled by the dead"; because of possible infections, there was a brief segregation prior to a resumption of normal social activities. There had to be a thorough cleansing, if a man handled *the things*, and then a restoration to normal activity at sundown (Lev. 22:4-7). There had to be a like washing after contact with "the carcass of an unclean beast" (Lev. 5:2; cf. 11:8). Actual handling of a defiled human body required purification for six days (Num. 19:11-21).

These laws kept Israel relatively free from many plagues over the centuries, and gave them a markedly lower mortality rate during the Black Death. In time, quarantine laws were adopted by

Christians, but, since World War II, they have been steadily discarded. This has been especially true of AIDS cases.

It is customary now to speak of this as a “ceremonial law”; this is an example of the false divisions so common to the modern man. The assumption is that things ceremonial, moral, and physical are unrelated; this is a modern assumption. In Scripture, cleanliness has reference to all aspects of life, including diet. The doctrine of cleanliness is related to *holiness*. Holiness means in part *separation*. Purity requires a separation in every sphere of life; it is a religious standard.

The association of uncleanness with death is a significant one, and a double-edged one. *First*, death does often result from contagious diseases, and hence the quarantine law with its purification requirement was an important health measure. The sick or dying person was *not* segregated, however, unless the ailments were known to be infectious. *Second*, death, according to Scripture, is the result of sin, of man’s fall. The modern view of death sees it as a normal fact of life, whereas in God’s sight it is an abnormal fact. The purification requirement is thus a witness to this abnormality. Life is normal, and eternal life is God’s goal for His people. Uncleanness is thus much more than dirt, and much more than disease, although it is inclusive of both. It is the state of fallen existence which God purposes to overcome in His new creation. We are required to treat death as an abnormality and eternal life as God’s goal for us.

In v. 3, a very important fact is stated. The unclean must be expelled and placed in quarantine because God dwells in the midst of His people. This present quarantine and separation is a witness to the fact that there shall be a great and final separation and quarantine into hell. This will be totally religious separation, unlike quarantines on earth. Here we have a limited quarantine, as in terms of health where contagious diseases are involved. We also have a form of quarantine in the prison system, which, while it is not Biblical, still retains an element of the Biblical premise of separation. In Revelation 21:3, 27, we have a vision of the final quarantine:

3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

27. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abominations, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

Modern culture is at war with the idea of quarantine. The goal in every sphere is the radical acceptance of things once barred, such as abortion, sodomy, and euthanasia. In the process, a new quarantine is being quietly established, this time against Christianity and all that it represents.

In vv. 5-10, we have, as in Leviticus 24:18, 21; 5:16; 6:1-7, and Exodus 22:1-17, laws of restitution. Restitution is closely related to purification and quarantine; the goal of both is the restoration of God’s order, whereas the goal of humanistic society is the reversal of God’s order.

The basic premise in these verses is, *first*, that, wherever there is an offense, restitution must be made to the injured party, plus a penalty. *Second*, if the injured party is dead, restitution must be made to his family or relatives. *Third*, if there are no living relatives, then restitution is made to the priest.

All offenses are also offenses against God as well as against men. It is His law which is broken, so that all sin is primarily against God.

In Exodus 22:1-17, the restitution is from double, i.e., the amount stolen plus an equal penalty, to fivefold, depending on the nature of the sin or crime. Here it is twenty percent (v. 7), as it is also in Leviticus 27:11-13, and 31. The difference is due to the varying offenses. In v. 6 we are told that any wrong done by one man to another is at the same time treason against the LORD. Hertz defined the wrong as any “breach of trust or wrongful misappropriation of the property of another.”¹⁵ We have the same law in Leviticus 5:14- 17 insofar as the restitution is concerned. In Leviticus 5:14-17 the sin is described, in Hertz’s study, as a “sin through error.” Instead of a willful offense, it is the result of carelessness and mindlessness.

This law thus demands two things. *First*, there must be the honesty to admit error, heedlessness, foolishness, and whatever else may be necessary. This kind of trespass is easy for people to excuse, saying, it was not my fault; it simply “happened.” A man may be innocent of malice and still do wrong. Confession is necessary. *Second*, there must be a payment of restoration plus a penalty. Good intentions do not eliminate liability for the consequences of our acts.

James Philip rightly observed of this requirement of confession and restitution, “Confession is putting things right with God; restitution is putting things right with one’s fellows.”¹⁶

This text makes it clear that God regards all wrongs committed, whatever the intentions, as requiring restitution. God allows no wrong to stand uncorrected. If men fail to make the corrections and the amends, God will exact it of them and their society.

The restoration to the offended party had to be six-fifths of the value of whatever thing was involved, i.e., the same returned or its equivalent, plus a fifth more. At the same time, an atonement offering had to be taken to the sanctuary and the priest, a ram without blemish (v. 8) for atonement. This in itself was a costly item.

There is still another interesting aspect to this. In vv. 8-10, it is very specifically stated that the offering of the ram belonged, not to all the priests in the sanctuary, but to the one priest to whom confession was made. This was because gratitude toward the man who leads us to an understanding of our wrong-doing is a religious necessity. We grow because of such knowledge and confession, and therefore gratitude is in order.

Chapter Seven
The Trial of Jealousy
(Numbers 5:11-31)

11. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
12. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man's wife go aside, and commit a trespass against him,
13. And a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of her husband, and be kept close, and she be defiled, and there be no witness against her, neither she be taken with the manner;
14. And the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled: or if the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be not defiled:
15. Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon; for it is an offering of jealousy, an offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance.
16. And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD:
17. And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water:
18. And the priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering: and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse:
19. And the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, If no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse:
20. But if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee beside thine husband:
21. Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, The LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell;
22. And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen.
23. And the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out with the bitter water:
24. And he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causeth the curse: and the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter.
25. Then the priest shall take the jealousy offering out of the woman's hand, and shall wave the offering before the LORD, and offer it upon the altar:
26. And the priest shall take an handful of the offering, even the memorial thereof, and burn it upon the altar, and afterward shall cause the woman to drink the water.
27. And when he hath made her to drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that, if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that

causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot: and the woman shall be a curse among her people.

28. And if the woman be not defiled, but be clean; then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed.

29. This is the law of jealousies, when a wife goeth aside to another instead of her husband, and is defiled;

30. Or when the spirit of jealousy cometh upon him, and he be jealous over his wife, and shall set the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute upon her all this law.

31. Then shall the man be guiltless from iniquity, and this woman shall bear her iniquity. (Numbers 5:11-31)

This is an extremely important text, a law but also much more than a law. It is, moreover, a very much misunderstood text. Humanists call it an example of a primitive trial by ordeal, and even Biblical commentators have so described it. In reality, it is the antithesis of a trial by ordeal.

The ordeal was a form of trial common in all parts of the world, and it still persists in some areas. It continued in Europe to the thirteenth century. It was especially important in ancient Germanic cultures, and the Germanic tribes continued its use long after their conversion; it was carried by them into England and was widely used there. Because of this importation into Christendom, the ordeal was cloaked in Christian language, but its premises were radically pagan.

If the ordeal were a duel, it was believed that the man in the right would win. In the water ordeal, the suspected person was bound and cast into deep waters. If the water rejected the woman or man, if their body floated, it was considered evidence of guilt: the water had rejected them. If the person sank, that is, if they were received by the water, they were pulled and declared innocent, if they survived the ordeal! Fire and water ordeals were common, both being important aspects of nature and basic “elements.” The church was able to curtail ordeals by forbidding, in 1215, any participation by the clergy or their presence as a part of the court. Trial by battle was less easily abolished.

The basic premise of the ordeal was the goodness of nature. Jean- Jacques Rousseau revived the essentials of this faith with his philosophy. The source of justice was not from a God beyond nature but from powers within nature. The appeal of the ordeal was to the essential justice of the world order. Alexander Pope’s statement, “Whatever is, is right,” the like premise of Lenny Bruce, of the twentieth century sexual revolution, and more, was the faith of the trial by ordeal. It was a turning away from God to nature for truth and justice. Such trials were thus a logical part of non-Biblical religions.

The trial by jealousy was the direct antithesis of the ordeal. No judgment was expected from nature, because the natural order, men included, is a fallen realm. Because creation is under a curse (Genesis 3:17-19), it is not nor can it be normative; it is fallen. Because man is also fallen, and is the cause of the fall, he is not normative, nor can he be the source of law. Instead of a trial by ordeal, which means a trial by nature, there must be rather a trial by God and by God’s law. The trial of jealousy was given as a radical contradiction to the ordeal.

The facts about this kind of trial are indicative of this. Such a trial was resorted to only when suspicion rather than evidence existed. A man might rightly or wrongly suspect his wife of adultery. What was at stake was the legitimacy of the children. Would the heir be the man's child, or another's? Hebrew records indicate that such a trial was not casually resorted to.

Two possibilities were obviously involved. Either the wife was guilty, and the suspicion was valid, or the husband was wrongly suspicious, and the woman was innocent.

The couple had to appear at the sanctuary. The woman bore in her hands an offering of barley meal provided by her husband; a cereal offering was used as a sin offering (Lev. 5:11). The woman's hair was to be unbound and allowed to hang loosely instead of being braided. In a sense, she was being "unmade," because the suspicion had hurt her status in the community. Such a trial could not be entered into lightly.

The priest then charged the woman with an oath, to which her response was, "Amen, amen." This was to indicate total assent to the proceedings and the will of God.

The woman was then to drink what was called "the bitter water," not because of any taste but because the trial was a bitter fact for her. Holy water had been taken and placed in an earthen vessel, and a little dust from the floor of the tabernacle mixed into it. From the naturalistic perspective, this was a harmless drink. No serious consequences, if any should follow.

If, however, the woman were guilty, the water would cause her belly to swell into a false pregnancy, her thigh to rot, and sterility to ensue. If she were innocent, there would be no consequence whatsoever: the woman would be acquitted, "and shall conceive seed" (v. 28).

In the offering prescribed for this trial, oil and frankincense, representing the Holy Spirit and Joy, were barred (Ps. 45:7; 1 Sam. 10:1). Oil and frankincense were also gifts of love and honor (Ezek. 23:41).

It is God's providential intervention which establishes the guilt: there is nothing natural about the verdict. The whole process of the ordeal is here reversed by God. It is not man or nature whose law or verdict must prevail but the law of God. This trial makes a mockery of the trial by ordeal. Only God's supernatural intervention provides a verdict. Justice has one source, God. Hence men must not look to man or nature for law and justice but to God alone. This kind of trial lasted for centuries but had disappeared a century or two before Christ's time.

In v. 23, we are told that the data concerning such a trial had to be recorded immediately by the priest; specifically, the curses were recorded, and then washed into the water of testing. If she were innocent, the water became an instrument of blessing: she shall conceive and have children (v. 28). The humiliation of this trial was turned into a blessing, and she was accorded honor as a mother in the covenant family.

Some have read v. 22 as describing also a miscarriage, but there is *no evidence* for this reading.

The vindication of the woman, if no consequences followed at once, was also the indictment, as it were, of the husband for false suspicion. "The spirit of jealousy" in him was publicly proven to be false and unjustified. This trial was also a vindication of God as the source of justice as against nature and man.

This law stands somewhat alone in the body of law. Some of the laws given throughout the books of Moses require legal judgments by human courts in terms of God's law. Other laws, many of them, leave the judgment to God's providential activities in history, or His judgments beyond history. This law states that, in a particular case, God intervenes directly to render judgment in a way that contradicts all trials by ordeal, all trust in the natural law and justice of nature. Such a trust was slowly won during the medieval era from nature to God. The ordeal was banned from legal practice, but, at the same time, philosophers, with the revival of Aristotle, began to restate the trust in nature in more sophisticated forms. The Renaissance and then the Enlightenment once again enthroned Nature and Nature's law. Romanticism, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, furthered this exaltation. We still have this faith in the form of environmentalism, animal rights, and like movements.

Another development took place within Romanticism. The Marquis de Sade accepted the sovereignty and normative character of Nature, but he stripped it of all pseudo-Christian content. Alexander Pope, in his *An Essay on Man*, declared:

Remember, man "the Universal Cause
Acts not by partial but by general laws;"
And what makes what happiness we justly call
Subsist not in the good one, but all.
There's not a blessing individuals find,
But some way leans and hearkens to the kind;
No bandit fierce, no tyrant mad with pride,
No cavern'd hermit, rests self-satisfied:
Who most to shun or hate mankind pretend,
Seek an admirer, or would fix a friend:
Abstract what others feel, what others think,
All pleasures sicken, and all glories sink:
Each has his share; and who would more obtain,
Shall find, the pleasure pays not half the pain.
ORDER is Heaven's first law.... (canto 4, st. 2)

For Pope, man's happiness rests on the good of all. Nature gives us personal fulfillment as we work in harmony with her and our fellow men. If we work contrary to this, "all pleasures sicken, and all glories sink," because "ORDER is Heaven's first law," and by Heaven Pope means a Deistic heaven and the whole realm of Nature.

Sade continued the worship of Nature but denied the pseudo-Christian veneer of morality ascribed to it. His view of an anti-moral Nature, "red in tooth and claw," turned Rousseau's views upside down, and, according to Paglia, "prefigures the theories of aggression in Darwin, Nietzsche, and Freud." For him, cruelty, perverse sexuality, and evil mark Nature. "Force, not

love, is the law of the universe, the highest pagan truth.”¹⁷ Modern thinkers have been heavily influenced by Sadean premises. The idea of Nature as normative has given way to Nature as totally permissive. This faith has been promulgated by the Kinsey Reports, and it finds expression in the sexual revolution, homosexual rights groups, the abortion movement, transsexual operations, and so on.

For many, in this chaos of the new view of nature, man or the state supplants nature. The results have been anarchism on the one hand and statism on the other.

A major movement has taken a different turn. As Paglia pointed out, in the Decadent phase of Romanticism, “Art supplants nature,” and the artist becomes the new priest, and the art gallery the new church. “The object d’art becomes the center of fetishistic connoisseurship. Person is transformed into beautiful thing, beyond the law.”¹⁸

As against all this stands the witness of this trial of jealousy. It tells us that the natural order has sin and therefore innocence which is unvindicated; it has jealousy, and an absence of justice within the fallen realm. God’s law is man’s only recourse against injustice, and God *can* and *does* intervene in the affairs of men and the natural realm to further His purpose and justice. We must never forget that the triune God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.

Chapter Eight

The Law of the Nazarite

(Numbers 6:1-21)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD:
3. He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.
4. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.
5. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.
6. All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body.
7. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head.
8. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD.
9. And if any man die very suddenly by him, and he hath defiled the head of his consecration; then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing, on the seventh day shall he shave it.
10. And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons, to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:
11. And the priest shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make an atonement for him, for that he sinned by the dead, and shall hallow his head that same day.
12. And he shall consecrate unto the LORD the days of his separation, and shall bring a lamb of the first year for a trespass offering: but the days that were before shall be lost, because his separation was defiled.
13. And this is the law of the Nazarite, when the days of his separation are fulfilled: he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:
14. And he shall offer his offering unto the LORD, one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings,
15. And a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat offering, and their drink offerings.
16. And the priest shall bring them before the LORD, and shall offer his sin offering, and his burnt offering:

17. And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread: the priest shall offer also his meat offering, and his drink offering.

18. And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings.

19. And the priest shall take the sodden shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazarite, after the hair of his separation is shaven:

20. And the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD: this is holy for the priest, with the wave breast and heave shoulder: and after that the Nazarite may drink wine.

21. This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the LORD for his separation, beside that that his hand shall get: according to the vow which he vowed, so he must do after the law of his separation. (Numbers 6:1-21)

We come now to the law of the Nazarites, whom Gordan J. Wenham has called “the monks and nuns of ancient Israel, lay men or women who consecrated themselves to the total service of God, usually for a specific period of time, though more rarely for life.”¹⁹ Samson and perhaps Samuel were lifelong Nazarites (Judges 13:4-5; 1 Samuel 1:11). In most instances, men were Nazarites for brief periods to fulfil a vow to God.

The word *Nazarite* comes from the Hebrew *nazir*, meaning “set apart.” *Nazir* sometimes means *prince*, as in Genesis 49:26, Deuteronomy 33:16, and Lamentations 4:7, and in Leviticus 25:5, 11, it means “a vine undressed” or unpruned. Vines were left unpruned in the seventh or sabbatical year in obedience to God’s law.²⁰

The Nazarite was a separated man. The emphasis, however, was not on deprivation but on the privilege of service. He was a man who had separated himself from the usual tasks and routines of his life to give himself to a particular cause or purpose.

He was not a priest, but his was apparently a greater holiness in that his separation was to a specific vow with a total dedication. I recall hearing, as a boy, of a man who, some years before in Armenia, had stepped aside from his normal vocation to study the writings of exceptionally profound monastic writers of the early centuries. He had traveled to a monastic library to do his research and had lived briefly like a monk. The Nazarite vow and life was similar; however diverse its specific form, it was a total separation to a specific godly purpose.

In v. 2, we are also told that a woman could become a Nazarite. (The word Nazarite is spelled differently in modern versions than in the Authorized Version; it is usually *Nazirite*, in closer conformity to the Hebrew.) Lifelong Nazarites were exceptional; usually the separation was a brief or temporary one in terms of a specific vow.

There were strict rules governing the vow. The *first* rule was abstinence, not only from wine and strong drink but also from everything connected with grapes. Because the term Nazarite had reference to being *unpruned* and totally dedicated to God, the person taking the vow separated

himself from any produce of the vine to indicate that he was observing a Sabbath. All men were required to observe every seventh year as a sabbatical year; the Nazarite vow was for an extra Sabbath of a specified duration, from a few weeks to a year or more. Because of the observance of Sabbath years and the requirement of no debt beyond six years, people lived relatively debt-free and without long-term debt. As a result, having normally no debt, they were able to accumulate enough of life's necessities to enter into a Nazarite vow and a special Sabbath. This was a Sabbath with a difference, however. It was a rest from one's normal vocation and a total dedication to a specific purpose.

The *second* aspect of the Nazarite vow was to avoid shaving (with men) and hair cutting with both men and women. It is a curious fact that in some religious communities, and most notably with the Buddhists, both priests and those with a temporary vow keep themselves totally shaven.

The *third* aspect of the Nazarite separation was the avoidance of dead persons. This separation held even if the dead were family members. The Nazarite's separation meant a total giving of himself to life, and hence contact with the dead was defiling. Even an accidental violation of this rule voided his vow and meant that the vow had to be made again with a new shaving and dedication. His hair this time had to be burned according to Hebrew practice.

A sacrifice had to be made to renew the vow, two doves or pigeons (cf. Lev. 12:8; cf. Luke 2:24; Lev. 14:22). A guilt offering, a lamb, had to be brought also (vv. 10-12). One dove was a sin offering, the other a whole offering. The sin offering was to restore communion with God because of the inadvertent violation of the vow, and the whole offering set forth total dedication to the Lord. The guilt offering was "paid to God for the loss of what was his due (cf. Lev. 14:12)."²¹

The Nazarite vow then could be remade, and a fresh start undertaken. This was very important. Men tend to believe that the routines of life take priority over other things. These requirements make it clear that a man's dedication to God's work takes priority, and any interference with that exacts a price.

On the completion of the vow, there was again a ceremony. *First*, the Nazarite offered sacrifices (vv. 13-17) at the tabernacle or sanctuary. All the regular offerings were made, a burnt offering, a peace offering, thank offering, drink offering, and so on. *Second*, the Nazarite was again shaved to indicate the end of his vow, and normal activities were resumed.

It is of interest that the old Hebrew rule forbade the Nazarite to fast. His calling during the days of his vow was to a particular task, *not* to self-affliction. He was not called to ascetic practices but to a specific duty.²²

Proverbs 20:25 warns against taking a vow rashly. The minimum period of a Nazarite vow was a month, or thirty days.

Nazaritism had and has an important place in Biblical faith. It sets forth the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. All persons are given the option not only of serving God in their daily

calling, but also of giving themselves a special task for a specific period of time. The vow they take is in terms of their particular aptitudes and vocations.

This is more common than we realize. Both in the spheres of foreign missions and national missions, the modern Nazarite has been active for many years in many ways. Christian farmers, on retirement, have spent one or more years at a mission station teaching converts sound farming practices; doctors on their vacations or sabbaticals have served at mission hospitals; dentists have similarly gone abroad to provide dental care for specified periods. Nurses have done the same, as have teachers. Builders have volunteered their services to assist in construction work, and so on.

At one time, a service at the home church marked the commissioning of our modern Nazarites. At one time, such persons carried a distinguishing “mark” of some sort, but all identifying Christian symbols are uncommon now because of the hostility of an anti-Christian culture.

Nazaritism needs more attention and notice. Its existence is already an important factor. In one community after another, given a crisis or urgent need, there are men and women who will dedicate themselves to providing organization and leadership for the duration, e.g., to fire victims, for refugees, for emergency cases of various kinds, and so on. All this is an aspect of the priesthood of all believers.

Wenham observed that “in holiness the Nazirite was regarded as equal to the high priest.”²³ While their functions and status differed, the Nazarite was important because his vow and work represented the faith in action.

A variation of the Nazarite vow was the pilgrimage journey of the early church and later. The first known pilgrim was Melito of Sardis (c. A.D. 190), who traveled to Palestine and to Sinai to verify Biblical data. Eusebius, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, identified Melito as a scholar bishop who sought “an accurate statement” of the background of Biblical history. Later, perhaps at about the sixth century, pilgrimages were often imposed as a public penance; earlier, some had undertaken it as a voluntary penance. Melito’s pilgrimage was to accomplish something, whereas later pilgrims had devotions or penance in mind.

Biblical Nazaritism was more concerned with dedication. The vow had a positive content and was *voluntary*. It was this voluntary dedication which set it apart as evidence of the priesthood of all believers.

God commands *every* believer to be holy. Nazaritism gives us instances of separation to holy tasks which are different from our daily duties. Separation, however, is a constant duty in every area of our lives, as persons, families, congregations, and nations. St. Paul sums up the matter in 2 Corinthians 6:14, where he forbids unequal yoking. His source is Exodus 23:31-33; 34:12-16, and Deuteronomy 7:1-4, where God forbids all military alliances, in war or in peace, with uncovenanted and unbelieving peoples. God’s curse is pronounced upon all who enter into marriages and alliances with the ungodly (Deut. 7:4). It is possible and common to enter into a marriage with someone who pretends to be a Christian, but to mistake an ungodly nation for a Christian one is difficult. George Washington, in his “Farewell Address,” warned against all such entangling alliances, but today Christians happily disregard God’s word, expecting to be raptured

for their apostasy, or, holding patriotism to be more important than obedience to Almighty God. This is open defiance of the Lord.

The United States, in January 1991, began warfare against Iraq in alliance with Islamic states and in some kind of alliance with Israel, a Jewish state, as a part of the godless United Nations. Of course, the United States is rapidly becoming anti-Christian, and its leadership is hardly godly. President George Bush's two sons are charged with financial misconduct. Interior Secretary Manuel Lujan, Jr.'s son, Robert Jeffrey Lujan, aged twenty-eight, was convicted on January 19, 1991, of rape, sodomy, and burglary by an Alexandria, Virginia, Circuit Court Jury.²⁴ The United States, for a variety of reasons, is hardly in any position to be a moral force in the world. Its assistance to the Soviet Union is indicative of moral bankruptcy.

Chapter Nine

Blessing the People

(*Numbers 6:22-27*)

22. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
23. Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,
24. The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:
25. The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
26. The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.
27. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.
(Numbers 6:22-27)

We have in these verses the priestly benediction ordered by God through Moses for use by Aaron and his sons. The Hebrew word for benediction (*berakhah*) comes from a word meaning “to fall on one’s knees.” Benedictions are pronounced by persons in authority, in terms of God’s word, and under His authority. Thus, no man can bless evil, or anything condemned by God, without incurring His judgment. A common form of blessing or benediction is by a parent to a child.

When a benediction occurs in a ceremony setting apart a building or some aspect of its furnishings, it is called a consecration.

There are a number of instances of benedictions in the Old Testament: Genesis 24:27; Exodus 18:10; Ruth 4:14; 1 Samuel 25:32- 33; 2 Samuel 18:28; 1 Kings 1:48; 5:7; 8:15, 56; 1 Chronicles 16:36; 2 Chronicles 2:12; 6:4; Psalm 28:6; 31:21, etc. In many of these cases, men are blessing God. The reason for this is that benedictions are also a form of gratitude and thanksgiving. The meaning of the Hebrew word, “to fall on one’s knees,” indicates that the one blessed receives a blessing *with thanksgiving*. Two magnificent psalms of blessing, 103 and 104, joyfully enumerate all God’s blessings and declare, “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Ps. 103:1). In 1 Chronicles 29:10-20 we have David’s prayers of thanksgiving, a long ascription of glory to God. In Psalm 119:12, we have both a giving of thanks and a petition in one sentence: “Blessed art thou O LORD: teach my thy statutes.”

A basic aspect of the benediction was and is the ascription of absolute sovereignty and Kingship to God. This is the necessary prerequisite to being blessed. We receive from God when we give Him all the glory, confessing His absolute sovereignty and His unfailing righteousness or justice as well as His grace and mercy.

It was a requirement of faith very early in Israel to bless God for all things, including disasters. This means recognizing God’s hand in all things. There were in Israel formal blessings to be recited for both good and bad tidings.²⁵ The Biblical precedent for this was Eli, the high priest. When told by Samuel of God’s coming judgment on his family, Eli said, “It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good” (1 Samuel 3:18). Normally, only those capable of learning from their failings and disasters can thank God for them.

This benediction of Numbers 6:22-27 is echoed and expanded in Psalm 67, a song of benediction:

1. God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah.
2. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.
3. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.
4. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Selah.
5. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.
6. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.
7. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

These verses help us to understand what a benediction means. The psalm rejoices in God's prospering benediction; it shall be known to all the earth, and "thy saving health among all nations." All the people and nations shall praise God, because He shall judge all with justice "and govern the nations upon earth." When this happens, "then shall the earth yield her increase," and men shall prosper as never before because of God's blessing. "All the ends of the earth shall fear him."

The ancient title to the psalm, as it appears in the Authorized Version, reads, "1. Prayer for enlargement of God's kingdom, 3. to the joy of the people, 6. and increase of God's blessings."

This is clearly a postmillennial psalm; it celebrates the certain victory in history of God's Kingdom.

Moreover, we see that this is the essence of benediction: we cannot reduce it to a purely personal and private blessing of our soul; it is total in its scope.

Numbers 6:22-27 is again basic to still another psalm, Psalm 121. This was apparently a pilgrim's song about the benediction of faith.

In v. 25, the benediction declares, "The LORD make his face shine upon thee," i.e., look upon you with favor and peace. In v. 26, we read, "The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." To lift up one's face towards someone is to recognize them and to be favorably inclined towards them. To hide one's face from someone means to ignore them out of a dislike for them. Thus, v. 26 speaks of being blessed. The word translated as "peace" is *shalom*, a word greatly cheapened in recent years. The Biblical meaning, as Walter Riggans points out, "carries a profound meaning of security in life from hardships and curses; of completeness and wholeness in life's experiences; of inner harmony and balance."²⁶

In v. 27, God declares, "And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them." This is an unusual statement, and it must not be passed over lightly, because it tells us much about the meaning of a benediction. In Dummelow, we read:

But in O.T. the ‘name of Jehovah,’ is His revealed character; see on Ex. 3:13. So that to ‘put Jehovah’s name’ upon a person is to declare to him the presence and nature of Jehovah. He gives them the assurance of Jehovah’s presence and favour.²⁷

This means that a benediction has no validity unless the word of God has been declared faithfully and without reservation. To put God’s name upon a people is to lead and instruct them into God’s truth. Only when this is done does a valid blessing follow.

There is a *theology of blessing*. It presupposes knowing God’s covenant word and obeying it. It is noteworthy that this benediction has a triune character, as does Paul’s benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:14:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

A benediction is a form of prayer. True prayer is in the will of God. It is not an effort to change God but to know Him and to find our place in His plan and purpose. Joseph Parker said,

We do not pray for fine weather for harvesting — nor for fine weather for the voyage — in any sense that interposes our supposed goodness between heaven and earth, as if we were more careful about the harvest than God is, or as if we cared more for the voyager’s life than does the Creator of that life and the Redeemer of it. Even such prayers as these — for bright sunshine, for south-west winds to dry the ripening corn, — we conclude with this part of the Lord’s prayer — “nevertheless not our will, but thine, be done.”²⁸

Putting the name of God upon His people has very important implications. In Scripture, *name* means nature, or character. Putting God’s name upon a people begins with the faithful teaching of His law-word; *then* the people can be blessed. In Micah 4:5 we have a reference to this fact:

For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

To walk in the name of one’s god means to live in terms of the morality of Buddha, Baal, Zeus, or whoever else might be our god. Thus, the presupposition of walking in the name of the Lord is to live in terms of His justice or righteousness, His grace, and His peace.

Ronald B. Allen commented on this benediction, “The prayer was a priestly function, for the priests were God’s gift to the nation to stand between himself and his people.”²⁹ When the pastoral function is faithfully administered by the priests, the word of God being fully taught, then there is a unity between God and His people, and blessings follow.

The priestly office, in the Old Testament era and since, has been broader than the clergy. Fathers have always had a priestly role, and hence the parental duty is to bless and to be a blessing to all members of the family. To bless those under our authority means to instruct and guide them, and

it requires governing them by means of God's law and grace. None in authority can be a blessing unless they have not only grace but also maturity as well. One of the gravest failings of all too many persons in authority is a singular lack of maturity. A childish adult is a curse, not a blessing.

Chapter Ten
The Offering of the Princes
(Numbers 7:1-88)

1. And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them;
2. That the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered:
3. And they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox: and they brought them before the tabernacle.
4. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
5. Take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service.
6. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites.
7. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service:
8. And four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.
9. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders.
10. And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed, even the princes offered their offering before the altar.
11. And the LORD said unto Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar.
12. And he that offered his offering the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah:
13. And his offering was one silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
14. One spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense:
15. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
16. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:
17. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab.
18. On the second day Nethaneel the son of Zuar, prince of Issachar, did offer:
19. He offered for his offering one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
20. One spoon of gold of ten shekels, full of incense:
21. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
22. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:

23. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Nethaneel the son of Zuar.

24. On the third day Eliab the son of Helon, prince of the children of Zebulun, did offer:

25. His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:

26. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:

27. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:

28. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:

29. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Eliab the son of Helon.

30. On the fourth day Elizur the son of Shedeur, prince of the children of Reuben, did offer:

31. His offering was one silver charger of the weight of an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:

32. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:

33. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:

34. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:

35. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Elizur the son of Shedeur.

36. On the fifth day Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, prince of the children of Simeon, did offer:

37. His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:

38. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:

39. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:

40. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:

41. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.

42. On the sixth day Eliasaph the son of Deuel, prince of the children of Gad, offered:

43. His offering was one silver charger of the weight of an hundred and thirty shekels, a silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:

44. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:

45. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:

46. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:

47. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

48. On the seventh day Elishama the son of Ammihud, prince of the children of Ephraim, offered:

49. His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
50. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:
51. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
52. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:
53. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Elishama the son of Ammihud.
54. On the eighth day offered Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, prince of the children of Manasseh:
55. His offering was one silver charger of the weight of an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
56. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:
57. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
58. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:
59. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.
60. On the ninth day Abidan the son of Gideoni, prince of the children of Benjamin, offered:
61. His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
62. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:
63. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
64. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:
65. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Abidan the son of Gideoni.
66. On the tenth day Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, prince of the children of Dan, offered:
67. His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
68. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:
69. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
70. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:
71. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.
72. On the eleventh day Pagiel the son of Ocran, prince of the children of Asher, offered:
73. His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
74. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:
75. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
76. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:

77. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Pagiel the son of Ocran.
78. On the twelfth day Ahira the son of Enan, prince of the children of Naphtali, offered:
79. His offering was one silver charger, the weight whereof was an hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meat offering:
80. One golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense:
81. One young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year, for a burnt offering:
82. One kid of the goats for a sin offering:
83. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs of the first year: this was the offering of Ahira the son of Enan.
84. This was the dedication of the altar, in the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve chargers of silver, twelve silver bowls, twelve spoons of gold:
85. Each charger of silver weighing an hundred and thirty shekels, each bowl seventy: all the silver vessels weighed two thousand and four hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary:
86. The golden spoons were twelve, full of incense, weighing ten shekels apiece, after the shekel of the sanctuary: all the gold of the spoons was an hundred and twenty shekels.
87. All the oxen for the burnt offering were twelve bullocks, the rams twelve, the lambs of the first year twelve, with their meat offering: and the kids of the goats for sin offering twelve.
88. And all the oxen for the sacrifice of the peace offerings were twenty and four bullocks, the rams sixty, the he goats sixty, the lambs of the first year sixty. This was the dedication of the altar, after that it was anointed. (Numbers 7:1-88)

Like so much else in the Bible, this is a neglected text. It is concerned, very specifically, with the gifts brought by the clan heads, or the princes of all the tribes. The Levites had a responsibility to transport the sanctuary and its furnishings from place to place as Israel journeyed in the wilderness. The gifts, or their offering or “oblation before the LORD,” were six covered wagons and twelve oxen (v. 3). Because there was a difference in what was to be transported by the Gershonites and the Merarites, the Gershonites received two wagons and four oxen, and the Merarites received four wagons and eight oxen (vv. 4-8). The Kohathites needed no wagon and received none.

These were gifts to God and were presented before the sanctuary, and dedicated there (vv. 10-11, 84, 88). Their use was assigned by God (vs. 4-8). Gifts and sacrifices were also brought. It was their duty to give, but also their privilege. As a result, given this premise, all giving to God is not only a requirement but also a blessed privilege. As Irving L. Jensen so tellingly observed,

In the text the listing of the gifts, though identical for each tribe, [is] recorded at length in what appears at first glance to be needless duplication (7:12-83), the intention apparently being to remind the reader that *no gift to God goes unrecorded in His book*. The total sum of the gifts is given in 7:84-88.³⁰

Each two princes or elders brought one wagon. All the gifts were the same. The plain fact of this text was once important to Christians, namely, “that no gift to God goes unrecorded in His book.” There are no brute facts, meaningless facts, in all of God’s creation. All factuality is God created and has an eternal purpose. It is this premise that makes possible St. Paul’s magnificent declaration,

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58)

Man’s histories reflect man’s limitations: they barely skim the surface of events. More than that is impossible for man. Ancient chroniclers sought to record the most important events; we know that they barely scratched the surface, and that their evaluation of what was significant was commonly flawed. God possesses total knowledge, and hence a total record of all things. We are told both that He holds man accountable for “the very last mite” (Luke 12:59), and yet His mercy is a lasting one (Ps. 89:2).

The dedication of the gifts made by the clan leaders lasted twelve days, one day’s ceremony for each man. The gifts were identical, as were the rites of dedication, yet they are not lumped into one total. We are again given a stress on God’s particularity: we are never faceless members of a crowd in His presence.

The holy objects assigned to the Kohathites were things to be carried on their shoulders. Hence, no oxen or wagons were assigned to them. Besides the oxen and the wagons, these men brought also the following gifts as summarized in vv. 84-88: twelve silver platters, twelve silver sprinkling bowls, and twelve gold dishes. The weight of *each* silver platter was 130 shekels, and of the sprinkling bowls, seventy shekels *each*, for a total weight of 2,400 shekels in the sanctuary’s standard. The twelve gold dishes (for incense) weighed ten shekels *each*, for a total of 120 shekels. The animals given for sacrifice were twelve young bulls, twelve mature rams, twelve yearling rams, and grain. “This was the dedication of the altar, after that it was anointed” (v. 88). These were very costly gifts.

These gifts were in essence *royal* gifts. They stressed the evident fact that God is the King over all creation as well as specifically the sovereign or Lord over His covenant people.

Chronologically, this chapter follows after Leviticus 8. They come after the consecration of Aaron and his sons. This placement here is to prepare us by way of contrast to the cowardice and apostasy which soon took place. As against their generous gifts, the princes and their followers soon manifested a distrust of God’s promises.

Apart from Psalm 119, this is probably the longest chapter in the Bible. Lange’s comment on it is similar to Jensen’s:

We have...a sample of sacred, divine book-keeping, whose separate lesson is that God is careful in all dealings with His people down to details and minutiae. And

this revelation is so comforting that we must not grudge the large space allowed to these entries, and wish that they were replaced by records that would clear up many things in this part of Scripture that are now very obscure.

Moreover this chapter may be appealed to in proof of the genuineness of this book. A later author would never have dreamed of composing such a record as this.³¹

Numbers 7, 8, and 9 give us the final events at Mount Sinai. After these episodes, Israel moved to Paran. These gifts of wagons were thus preparatory to the move of the encampment. It is of interest that these were “covered wagons” (v. 3), made to protect whatever was transported. Each prince’s gift was dedicated on one day, making twelve days of rites. The first day’s gift came from Nahshon, of the tribe of Judah; the succession then followed the order of the encampment. The repeated exactness of the account gives us a revelation of God alien to the modern man. The popular view of God now is that He is a great mass of feeling and love, not an accountant; in the view of many, such chapters as this are to be discounted because they seem to reveal God as an accountant rather than as a benevolent grandfather. However, for an accurate doctrine of God, we need the whole revelation of God as given in all the Bible. The antipathy to this aspect of revelation, God’s preciseness, is part of the modern scene. Because man is in revolt against the God of order, he resents order in the world at large. Technology today is definitely an order requiring precision; we cannot be imprecise in dealing with machinery without trouble. Yet modern man rails against precision and treats the clock as a tyrant, despite the fact that the careful clocking of time has given man more freedom and societal advancement than men today can begin to imagine. The Romantic movement’s conception of God has led to romanticism and disorder in all spheres, to a rebellion against clarity and precision.

According to Exodus 40:17, the tabernacle was completed and erected on the first day of the first month of the second year of the Exodus. On that very day, Numbers 7:1 tells us, the events of this chapter began, on the first anniversary of the Exodus. Everything that follows is an aspect of this great thanksgiving to God for their deliverance.

This is again a noteworthy fact. There is no small hostility in many churches to observances of the Christian calendar, whether it be Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving Day, or anything else. The reason given is Colossians 2:16-19. This text, in the Berkeley Version, reads:

16. Allow no one, therefore, to be your judge in regard to eating and drinking or the observance of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.
17. These are shadows of things to follow, but the body is Christ.
18. Let no one defraud you of salvation’s victory prize, no one who indulges in assumed humility and the cult of angel-worship; who brags of visions and, though empty, is inflated by his worldly mind.
19. Instead of keeping hold on that Head from which the whole body, gathering vigor and held together by ligaments and sinews, grows with God’s increase.

This is a much misunderstood text. Paul lists a number of things by which men *in the church* were judging one another, some good, some bad. Paul, for example, was not saying that Sabbath

observances are bad; neither was he saying that “the cult of angel-worship” was good. What he *does* say is that we are not to allow anyone to be our judge in these matters. The observance of one festival may be good, and another may not be. What Paul says is that these are *not* the criteria for judgment: “the body is Christ.” The basis of judgment must be in terms of faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Every age has set up its standards and imposed them on Christians. Many churches in our time, for example, judge people in terms of the use of tobacco or alcoholic beverages. Paul tells us that, good or bad, all such things are trifles. Our salvation in Jesus Christ is the heart of the matter. This text thus *cannot* be used against anniversaries or holy days: these are not matters for judgment. Here in Numbers 7 the anniversary of the Exodus is observed, and it is blessed by God. Time is God’s creation, and its celebration in various ways is clearly recognized by Scripture.

References to God’s bookkeeping are numerous in Scripture. *Some* of these are the following: Exodus 32:32; Ezekiel 13:9; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 22:10. The coverage of many martyrs over the centuries has rested on this fact, namely, that, because God’s records are total, and because all things work together for good for those who are His called ones (Rom. 8:28), our every suffering for His sake means an eternal victory and peace. Modern man, having rejected the idea of a bookkeeping God, faces a world of increasing emptiness and meaninglessness. We see the decline of meaning and truth in one sphere after another. Journalists routinely invent quotations and ascribe them to someone whom they have interviewed (I have had this happen to me), and laws of slander and libel have eroded in meaning and application. In the sphere of criticism, the deconstructionists give reinvented meanings to a man’s writings in terms of their own presuppositions. The results are obvious all around us, but the self-blinded will not see.

Chapter Eleven

The Consecration of the Levites (*Numbers 7:89-8:26*)

89. And when Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with him, then he heard the voice of one speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and he spake unto him. (Numbers 7:89)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Speak unto Aaron, and say unto him, When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick.
3. And Aaron did so; he lighted the lamps thereof over against the candlestick, as the LORD commanded Moses.
4. And this work of the candlestick was of beaten gold, unto the shaft thereof, unto the flowers thereof, was beaten work: according unto the pattern which the LORD had shewed Moses, so he made the candlestick.
5. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
6. Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them.
7. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean.
8. Then let them take a young bullock with his meat offering, even fine flour mingled with oil, and another young bullock shalt thou take for a sin offering.
9. And thou shalt bring the Levites before the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt gather the whole assembly of the children of Israel together:
10. And thou shalt bring the Levites before the LORD: and the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites:
11. And Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering of the children of Israel, that they may execute the service of the LORD.
12. And the Levites shall lay their hands upon the heads of the bullocks: and thou shalt offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, unto the LORD, to make an atonement for the Levites.
13. And thou shalt set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them for an offering unto the LORD.
14. Thus shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel: and the Levites shall be mine.
15. And after that shall the Levites go in to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering.
16. For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me.
17. For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself.
18. And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.

19. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel: that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary.

20. And Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites according unto all that the LORD commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did the children of Israel unto them.

21. And the Levites were purified, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron offered them as an offering before the LORD; and Aaron made an atonement for them to cleanse them.

22. And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the tabernacle of the congregation before Aaron, and before his sons: as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so did they unto them.

23. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

24. This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation:

25. And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more:

26. But shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge. (Numbers 8:1-26)

Numbers 7:89 is a statement which some say is unrelated to what precedes it and what follows it. It is very closely related to Exodus 25:22, where God declares to Moses:

And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

This is a promise specifically to Moses. Having been called to leadership, Moses is promised the communion and guidance necessary to maintain a godly authority. God spoke “from above the mercy seat.” Because He transcends all things, nothing in the Holy of Holies could contain Him; therefore His voice is separated from the ark although associated with it. God is the covenant God, but He transcends and is greater than all His revelations and relationships. For us now the incarnate word and the enscriptured word replace this channel of contact.

In vv. 5-22, we have the consecration of the Levites. Prior to that, in vv. 1-4, we have directions for the lighting of the lampstands. These, “the lampstand for the light” literally, are called in Hebrew *Menorah*. The whole lampstand was made of a single piece of beaten gold, and it had seven branches. In Zechariah 4, the lamps are said to be the eyes of God watching all creation. In Revelation 1:12-20, the church is said to be the sevenfold lampstand, the number seven representing totality, i.e., all the church. *Light* and *life* are commonly associated; light makes life possible. Hence, it is the light of true faith which gives life to the world.³² The church as God’s

lampstand is to bring life through Christ to the world, and it must also see the world as God sees it. To see the world in terms of our nation, race, or church is to darken the believer's vision. The light from the lamps was to be so positioned as to fall on the table of the shewbread. We know the basic shape and design of the golden lampstand because Titus seized the Temple's lampstand and took it to Rome. It is depicted on the Arch of Titus.

In vv. 5ff., we have the cleansing and the consecration of the Levites. The Levites are substitutes for all the firstborn of Israel (vv. 16-19), and they are given to God's use in place of the firstborn. The firstborn represent the rest, and they must lead all others in God's service.

As a part of the consecration of the Levites, they came bathed, with their clothing freshly washed. They were then sprinkled to signify cleansing, and their whole body was shaved. Of this shaving, Bush wrote:

This was another symbol of purification similar to that of the leper, who shaved off all his hair as well as washed his flesh, as a part of the process of his cleansing, Lev. 14:8-9. The same ceremony was ordained also in the case of the polluted Nazarite, Ch. 6:9.³³

This evokes an image alien to modern man, who cannot think of himself as a leper in God's sight, albeit a cleansed leper in Christ. Even less are candidates for the clergy ready to see themselves in the same light; they are commonly regarded as idealistic and noble youth, and they see themselves in terms of their calling rather than in light of God's recognition of their sinful estate. Isaiah, on the contrary, when confronted by the vision of God in the Temple, became sharply aware of his uncleanness (Isa. 6:5).

In v. 19, we have an important statement. In the Berkeley Version, this reads,

I have given the men of Levi as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the nation of Israel to perform the service of her people in the meeting tent and to atone for them, so that there may not be a plague in the nation of Israel when her people approach the Holy Place.

First of all, the Levites, while having a varied ministry, were not priests; they were called to assist the priests in the religious services, but they could not supplant them. *Second*, they were substitutes (vv. 16-19) for all the firstborn of Israel and thus represented the people in that sense. *Third*, their service in representing all averted "a plague" or the judgment of death on the nation. They were in this respect in a more critical position than the priests. *Fourth*, their calling in some sense affected atonement for all Israel. This was a continuous function. But atonement in what sense? They were a substitute for all the firstborn, and thus a living sacrifice for them. The death of the firstborn in Egypt meant death for Egypt. By being the instructors of Israel (Deut. 33:10) and serving God's sanctuary, the Levites gave redemptive mercies, a kind of mediator of the atonement. As the ordained firstborn of Israel, they typified the firstborn of God, Jesus Christ.

When v. 7 speaks of the sprinkling of the Levites, it is by the "water of purifying," or, "the water of expiation." A.R.S. Kennedy called it the "water of un-sin-ment." Just as water washes away

dirt, so the sprinkling signified the inner cleansing by the Holy Spirit. When v. 21 states that the Levites “were purified,” it means literally “unsinners themselves,” or, “had themselves unsinners.”³⁴ Their new status represented the judicial act of God; their moral conduct thereafter depended on whether or not they were truly called and atoned for by God’s grace.

In v. 10 we have an account of the laying on of hands by other Israelites, probably the tribal leaders. Because the Levites represented all Israel, and because they were living sacrifices, the men of Israel had to participate in their ordination to their task. This verse has an important place in the history of ordination. In some churches ordination is exclusively the act of the clergy, or of the church hierarchy. This verse is one of those used to justify lay participation in ordinations. The Levites were the substitutes for the firstborn and were thus the gifts of all men in the covenant to the covenant God. In v. 13, the Levites are referred to as “an offering unto the LORD.” They are thus a kind of unbloody atonement (v. 19) and forerunners of the great firstborn, Jesus Christ.

As Walter Riggans pointed out, in the Old Testament, the laying on of hands has a twofold function: 1) to accompany or transfer a blessing (Gen. 48:14ff.; Numbers 27:18, 23); or, 2) to transfer sin and guilt (Lev. 1:4; 16:21-22). In the New Testament, the laying on of hands means a blessing, because for us the burden of sin and guilt has been laid upon Jesus Christ. Examples of New Testament blessings are, *first*, our Lord’s blessing of the little children who ran to Him (Matt 19:13ff.). *Second*, when people were blessed with healing, there was a laying on of hands (Mark 6:5; Luke 4:40; Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8). *Third*, there was a laying on of hands at baptism (Acts 9:17-18, 19:5- 6; Heb. 6:2). *Fourth*, we see the laying on of hands in the early church’s ordinations (Acts 6:6, 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).

In v. 10, the representatives of the people laid hands upon the Levites; in v. 12, the Levites laid hands upon the bullocks to be sacrificed. Sin was thus transferred from the people to the Levites to the sacrificial animals, who represented the innocent sin-bearer who was to come, Jesus Christ.

In vv. 23-26, we are told that the term of service for the Levites was between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. Two things must be noted here. *First*, this has reference to their service at the sanctuary. This did *not* mean retirement at fifty years; rather, the Levites served all Israel in various capacities, including those of instructor and teacher; they were also involved in charitable activities. Before twenty-five and after fifty, the Levite was very active. While serving at the sanctuary, they were in the full vigor of their manhood; their services elsewhere thereafter were in the fullness of their maturity. *Second*, we need to remember that the term *service* here means military action; the Levites are in God’s army, engaged in recapturing this world for the Lord. The age limit applies thus to their service in the sanctuary; they are draftees for life.

This fact of being drafted for life comes out vividly in v. 11, where we read that “Aaron shall offer (or, wave) the Levites before the LORD for an offering (or, wave offering) of the children of Israel, that they may (or, may be to) execute the service of the LORD.” In the usual wave offerings, the thing waved was moved horizontally towards the Holy of Holies, to indicate that it was given to God, and then back, to show that God returned it to the priests for their use. The Levites were thus given to God and then returned to the priests to be the Lord’s troops in His

work. How the actual waving of men was done, we do not know. Aaron may have had them walk forward and then return from the altar.

There were diverse functions performed by the Levites. According to 1 Chronicles 23:3-5, the Levites served not only in the sanctuary duties specified in Numbers but also as officers, judges, and temple musicians. They had charge of the Temple treasures (1 Chron. 26:20-28). The tithe was commonly given to them to administer, and they in turn gave a tithe of the tithe to the priests (Numbers 18:21-28). Other services were also performed by the Levites as God's army to carry out His work in the life of the covenant people.

Chapter Twelve

The Passover

(Numbers 9:1-14)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying,
2. Let the children of Israel also keep the passover at his appointed season.
3. In the fourteenth day of this month, at even, ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it.
4. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover.
5. And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel.
6. And there were certain men, who were defiled by the dead body of a man, that they could not keep the passover on that day: and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day:
7. And those men said unto him, We are defiled by the dead body of a man: wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the LORD in his appointed season among the children of Israel?
8. And Moses said unto them, Stand still, and I will hear what the LORD will command concerning you.
9. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
10. Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep the passover unto the LORD.
11. The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.
12. They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it.
13. But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin.
14. And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the LORD; according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger, and for him that was born in the land. (Numbers 9:1-14)

Some years ago, Charles R. Erdman summarized the meaning of the Passover and the Lord's Table in these telling words:

The Feast of Passover was the type and counterpart of the Sacred Supper of our Lord. Each points backward to a past deliverance and forward to a greater

deliverance to come. Passover commemorated the rescue of Israel from bondage in Egypt and looked forward to the redemption of the world to be wrought by Christ. The Sacrament recalls the redeeming death of our Lord and looks forward to the completed salvation to be accomplished when he comes again.³⁵

The Passover normally occurred on the anniversary of the Exodus: some Christians have observed it over the generations annually, at the season of the atonement and resurrection. Under Hezekiah, the Passover was observed in the second month because both the people and the priests were unclean and needed time for repentance and cleansing (2 Chron. 30:1-22). Participation in the Passover was mandatory for all who were in the covenant except for those on a journey, or those ritually unclean. All others were cut off or excommunicated (v. 13) for failure to observe the Passover. It constituted a denial of salvation. Hezekiah's postponement of the observance thus had instruction and preparation in mind.

In v. 14, we see that "strangers" or foreigners were allowed to participate in the Passover. These were believers in various nations who made pilgrimages to the sanctuary, and this text provides for their reception. Later in Israel's history, we see references to these peoples, as in Psalm 87 and 1 Kings 8:41-43.

The Passover celebrated salvation, and, therefore, life. To be "cut off" from the Passover, to be excommunicated, meant to be cut off from life. It meant also separation from the community. It was *excommunication*. That word means little to most people now, because excommunication has become incidental and peripheral to modern life. Moreover, where it is used, it is for infraction of church rules more than a violation God's law. Two factors in the modern world militate against the efficacy of excommunication. *First*, the use of this power has too often been ecclesiastical rather than theological; it has been church-centered rather than God-centered. While the church is very important to the process of excommunication, its place is instrumental rather than determinative. The criterion is not the church's law but God's law. *Second*, excommunication is separation from the community, and, where community does not exist, there can be no efficacious excommunication, humanly speaking. The modern state rests on neither blood nor faith, i.e., neither on a racial basis, in most cases, nor on a theological or creedal foundation. The governing factor is not community but the state. This results in a shattering of the communal ties between men. The social bond now rests, not on faith, but on work, i.e., business, union, or job ties, or recreation, a common interest in sports. Excommunication cannot function in a fractured society because the important ties which bind men together are gone. No man is now a social outcast if he is excommunicated.

The community of the covenant is constituted by the covenant law and its rites. The law gives us the form of the community. The people have been brought into being by God's electing and redeeming act. God's law defines them as a *justice people*, a nation dedicated to righteousness. The law provides a people with their moral backbone; the absence of any strong character or motivation for good in modern peoples manifests the absence of God's law, its replacement by self-will and self-indulgence.

To be left out of the community was once a serious matter. For this reason, those who, through no moral fault but because of contact with dead bodies, were ritually unclean, raised a question.

Should they be excluded? Moses turned to God for an answer. The response from God was that all who were ritually unclean, or who were on a journey afar off, could observe the Passover a month later.

In this text, no form of ritual uncleanness is cited, and there is no moral dereliction in caring for a dead body. This is both an historical incident and also a case law. If something which is not morally defiling bars a man from the Passover, how much more so does moral and theological waywardness bar a man. Too casual a readiness to partake of the Passover and communion is an offense. Some churches required confession to a priest, or examination by a session or a consistory, as a prerequisite to admission. Without concerning ourselves with the manner of admission, self-examination, or some form of confessional, the point is that Scripture sees partaking as something of a restricted matter, yet necessary. No moral perfection is required by any means, but rather faithfulness and growth in sanctification.

The statement concerning excommunication reads, “even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people” (v. 13). In James Moffatt’s version, this reads, “that person shall be outlawed from his kinfolk.” This stress is an important one, because the separation from one’s community begins in the family. To be separated from one’s parents, husband, wife, or children means being cut off from our basic community. Nothing is harder or more devastating than this. Excommunication begins in the family because it is the essential center of all community.

Some churches forbid communion services outside the church except on stated occasions. Others provide communion for the sick and for elderly people who are house-bound. The biblical justification for this latter practice is in vv. 10-12. If a traveler can have a later Passover service, why not the sick?

It must be remembered that the Passover celebrated atonement: it was the feast of the atonement, hence its essential meaning was life. Neither the Passover nor the Lord’s Table can be tied to mystical or spiritual experiences or emotions. It is the remission of sins, followed by our regeneration, which the rite celebrates. We are by virtue of atonement God’s new humanity, a new human race created by the Messiah to take over His Kingdom, the world.

This is why Erdman’s comments are so relevant. This sacrament looks back at the great atonement event, and it looks ahead to our great victory as a result of it. The power of sin is progressively broken, and, before the end, the last enemy, death, is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24-26). Then the fullness of the true community, the Kingdom of God, will be realized.

Because the Passover and communion look forward to that community, there must be community within the church if communion is celebrated. The deacon’s offering for the needy cannot be an after-thought or a minor gesture. Communion in and with Christ requires that communion with “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40), Christ’s needy ones, be a vital part of the Christian community.

Chapter Thirteen

Following the Lord

(Numbers 9:15-23)

15. And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning.

16. So it was alway: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.

17. And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.

18. At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.

19. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not.

20. And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.

21. And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

22. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed.

23. At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses. (Numbers 9:15-23)

At the time of the Exodus, the fertility of Arabia was far greater than we realize. There were still streams and forests and thus an abundance of grass and game. All the same, it was necessary from time to time to shift the encampment's location.

Moreover, the changes in location had to be determined by God. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle by day, and the fire by night, Israel was to remain in that place. When the cloud or the fire moved, then, whether by day or by night, all Israel had to move also.

In this respect, they resembled an army on the march. In the twentieth century, radio communications guide armies on the move. In antiquity, an army or a caravan was preceded by a burning torch whose flame or smoke guided those behind in the way that they should go.³⁶ In this instance, the fire was not an actual blaze but something which in its fierce brightness resembled a consuming fire. The goal of the journeying away from Sinai was to the borders, finally, of Edom, and then into Canaan.

In vv. 22-23, the purpose of these instructions is clearly stated: "Israel's total conformity to the will of God."³⁷ The guidance was miraculous. There was nothing natural about the cloud and the fire; they were constantly present throughout the wilderness experience, and they were inseparable from the sanctuary. This manifestation reappeared at the dedication of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8:10); we encounter it again at the Transfiguration of our Lord (Matt. 17:5). It is to accompany the end of the world and Christ's return (Mk. 13:26; cf. Rev. 1:7).

Here the cloud and the fire set forth the divine presence. God is with His people to guide them. There is an additional significance: protection. In Psalm 105:39, we read, "He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night." The fire and the cloud were visible expressions of God's invisible presence.

They constitute a theophany, an appearance of God. These theophanies are related to the various names or titles given to God throughout the Bible. They are aspects of God's self-revelation, but they are all partial in their scope. Gustave F. Oehler said of God's name:

In short, God names Himself, not according to what He is for Himself, but to *what He is for man*; and therefore every self-presentation of God in the world is expressed by a corresponding name of God.... But the biblical notion of the divine name is not exhausted by this. It is not merely the title which God bears in virtue of the relation in which He places Himself to man: but the expression "name of God" designates at the same time the whole divine self-presentation by which God in personal presence testifies of Himself — *the whole side of the divine nature which is turned toward man*. Be it understood, the divine name is not everywhere present where there is a working of divine power; but everywhere present where the God of Revelation, as such, gives Himself to be recognized in His acts so as to be confessed and invoked.³⁸

A theophany is related to the various names of God. Where there is a theophany, there is usually also the use of the "name" *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*; when *Elohim* is used, this is not normally the case, and its use is not normally connected with theophanies. Because theophanies are God's appearances *to man*, there is an interesting aspect to them, in that *Jehovah*, or *Yahweh*, is the name almost always used because this name is self-revelation. Two facts are clear. *First*, *Jehovah* means "I am that I am," or "He who Is" (Ex. 3:14); it is the most difficult term applied to God because it means that He is beyond definition. He is absolute Being and the source of all definition and the Creator of all things. The use of this "name" stresses the unbridgeable gulf of being and nature between God and man. It is a name that speaks of transcendence and remoteness. *Second*, at the same time, it is usually when *Yahweh* is used that we have anthropomorphisms applied to God. Precisely when His transcendence is most stressed do we find His nearness most simply set forth, in language borrowed from man's vocabulary about Himself. This is clearly true also of this theophany, the fire and the cloud. It is simple and very understandable. The reference is to a realm of experience common to all, cloud and fire. God, who is beyond time and space, manifests Himself in ways that creatures of time and space can understand.

This text makes it clear, especially vv. 22-23, that the covenant people were called to be faithful. In Morgan's words,

No responsibility rested on the people save that of obedience. They were not called on to consider the time or direction of their march, but it is equally true they were not permitted to object or delay. All of which served to keep the fact of the sovereign authority of Jehovah perpetually before them.³⁹

It is customary in our time to treat *obedience* as a childish and simplistic requirement, but God emphatically requires it of us, and He stresses it with different words and in various ways. Throughout their journeying, the fire and the cloud were very visible and dramatic reminders of God's command. They were a reminder that God's word and will must command and control us. A man who feels no need for such reminders is dangerous. Certainly one of the functions of preaching and worship is that God's reminders remain fresh in our minds.

Seven times vv. 15-23 speak of "the commandment of the LORD"; "the charge of the LORD" is referred to twice (vv. 19, 23). The stress on obedience is thus very strong.

The abiding location of the pillar of cloud and of fire was always the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies in particular. It represented not only God's presence, guidance, and protection, but also His very present power and judgment. Israel understood this. In Numbers 17:10-13, the rebels recognized that this Presence meant death to all who were disobedient. God's Presence works both ways: to bless and to curse. This is a fact which neither national Israel nor the church has fully appreciated. In 1 Peter 4:17, we are plainly told that "judgment must begin at the house of God." Our Lord declares,

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:48)

The privilege of God's presence means greater judgment when faithlessness or apostasy occur. At the same time, Isaiah 4:4-6 tells us of the privileges which make a repentant, regenerate, and faithful people:

4. When the LORD shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning.
5. And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.
6. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and rain.

The reference here by Isaiah is to the future, when God will purge His true church of all apostasy and protect His covenant with a care exceeding that of the wilderness journey. This text thus has reference to God's people in every age; because they are a privileged people, they are also a

readily judged people. God disciplines and prepares them for the dominion work of His Kingdom.

A final note: an obvious fact about this text is its repetitive character. We have an exercise in discipline over Israel in this text, and a stress on obedience to us. The Almighty still expects the same meticulous obedience from us.

Chapter Fourteen

The Trumpets and Warfare

(Numbers 10:1-10)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps.
3. And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.
4. And if they blow but with one trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee.
5. When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east parts shall go forward.
6. When ye blow an alarm the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey: they shall blow an alarm for their journeys.
7. But when the congregation is to be gathered together, ye shall blow, but ye shall not sound an alarm.
8. And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be to you for an ordinance for ever throughout your generations.
9. And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.
10. Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God: I am the LORD your God. (Numbers 10:1- 10)

When I was a boy, I heard occasional references to this text, and, during the Vietnam War, I read of one pastor's use of it. In the main, however, it is a forgotten text.

Before going into an account of its meaning, a glance at the use of trumpets as a signal needs to be cited because we are so remote to such signaling. Some of us can recall the days when military communication still relied in part on a bugler, mostly during encampment. Much earlier, signals to the troops were sounded by a bugler.

At one time, such signaling was widely used. A well-known form was bagpipe music. The various clans had excellent means of communication from village to village as well as during a battle. A familiar tune played by a piper could be changed by various means from a church to a wedding tune, or to a summons to battle, warning of an impending attack. The same tune, played slightly differently, but instantly recognizable to all clan members, provided a very rapid means of communication. An army could be assembled in haste from far and near as pipers passed on the summons.

The silver trumpets of Numbers have reference to a like use. The text makes it clear there is a difference between various calls, especially a general alarm. Such means of communication have had an important part in past history. The Arch of Titus, commemorating the fall of Jerusalem in the war of A.D. 66-77, depicts these silver trumpets. They were long, straight, and slender tubes with flared ends. The trumpets were apparently three to four feet long, although some say eighteen inches only (Josephus).⁴⁰ In 2 Chronicles 13:12-16, we have a reference to their use in war. In the Apocrypha, 1 Maccabees 4:40, we have an example of their use in the intertestamental era. Josephus also refers to the trumpets (*Antiquities* iii.12.6.) We have references in the New Testament to the trumpets in relation to the Last Judgment (Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; Rev. 8-9). Within Christendom, church bells replaced the trumpets as a call to worship; bells also informed people of various things. The use of trumpets in the fall of Jericho is well known (Joshua 6:1-20). A trumpet blast has come to mean a dramatic marking of time, announcing a beginning or an ending, or some great event.

The uses of the trumpets were varied and included: (1) to assemble the people, or their leaders; (2) to signal the time to march; (3) to call upon the Lord for help in battle, and to muster the fighting men; and (4) to call for the Lord's presence at festivals (Ps. 98:6). The trumpets were in the possession of the priests. Walter Riggans wrote, "It was the priests who blew the trumpets, further stressing God's control over the camp."⁴¹ This tells us why this is now a neglected text. It requires a Biblical decision to declare war: the control of the trumpets was not in the hands of the state. A Dutch commentator, Maarsingh, wrote:

...the blowing of the trumpets and the sounding of alarm had to do directly with God. Twice we read that the blowing of the trumpets constituted an appeal to him to graciously remember his people — both in time of peace and in time of war (vv. 9-10). The short concluding sentence "I am the Lord your God" means "you can rely on me."⁴²

God required that, in order to rely on Him, they obey His covenant law.

This meant that the laws of God governing war and peace had to prevail. This also meant recourse by the civil leaders to the priests and Levites for a judgment out of the law before any steps were taken. This was mandatory if God's blessing was desired. For example, when King Jehoshaphat of Judah joined King Ahab of Israel and they decided on war against Syria, Jehoshaphat, while recognizing Syria's aggressions, refused to go to war unless God's will were ascertained through God's prophetic ministry. The false preachers or prophets summoned by Ahab all said, "go." There being no true priesthood nor Levitical order in Israel, Jehoshaphat asked for a faithful prophet, and Micaiah, the son of Imlah, was sent for. Micaiah made known God's disfavor and predicted the death of Ahab (1 Kings 22).

This was the practice. No covenant people could rightfully move apart from God's covenant law. To do so meant making an enemy of God. Because God is King over all creation, king of the universe, His law-word must govern every sphere. Calvin stressed this text greatly, and his comments must be cited at least in part:

We know how often in earthly affairs God is not regarded, but counsels are confidently discussed without reference to His word. He testified, therefore, by this employment of the priests, that all assemblies, except those in which He should preside, were accursed....

He was also unwilling that wars should be undertaken precipitately, nor with the desire of vengeance, but that the priests should perform the office of heralds, in order that he might be the originator of them himself.... We must, however, observe the promise, which is inserted, that the Israelites “should be remembered before the Lord,” that he should put their enemies to flight; not as if the safety or deliverance of the people was attached to the trumpets, but because they did not go to the battle except in reliance on God’s aid. For the reality itself is conjoined with the external symbol, viz., that they should fight under God, should follow Him as their Leader, and should account all their strength to be His grace. And that all the saints were guided by this rule appears from Psalm xx. 7, — “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God”: and again, “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy. (Ps. xxxiii. 16, 18.)”⁴³

How then shall we interpret this text? The priests and the Levites were required to expound the meaning of God’s covenant law. They were not given the power to pass sentence upon a law-breaker, but they were called upon to cite the laws of God as they applied to a particular offense or charge. Similarly, when war was considered, the priests and the Levites would apply the law of God to the current crisis. The declaration of war was then a decision of the civil authority, but the formal proclamation came with the trumpet blasts.

The reason for this rested also on the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). Life is God’s creation, and it can only be taken on God’s terms as set forth in His law. Accordingly, there are laws governing the killing of certain animals for food, laws concerning wild animals both clean and unclean, laws concerning self-defense and the killing of those who invade our houses, laws governing warfare, laws with respect to executing certain criminals, and so on. For this reason, warfare especially must be subject to God’s laws (Num. 1:2-3, 18, 20, 45; 10:9; 21:14; 26:3-4; Deut. 20:19- 20; etc.). Therefore, the sounding of the trumpets was the work of the priests; it could not be coerced without sin. As T.E. Espin wrote, “As the trumpets were emblematic of the voice of God the priests only were to use them.”⁴⁴ The peaceful uses of the trumpets were not of the same “controversial” character as the use in proclaiming war.

According to W. Binnie, the silver trumpets cited here must not be confused with the trumpet of jubilee (Lev. 25:9; Luke 4:16):

Although bearing the same name in the English Bible, these are quite different instruments, and are called by different Hebrew names. The former is *shophar* or *cornet*, which, as its name implies was of horn, or at least horn-shaped; whereas the latter, the *chatsotser*, was a long straight tube of silver with a bellshaped

mouth. The true intention of the silver trumpets is distinctly enough indicated in the law before us.⁴⁵

In every use of the trumpets, according to v. 10, they are said to be “for a memorial before your God.” The word translated as *memorial* is in the Hebrew *zikrown*, a record, writing, or memento. The same word appears in Leviticus 23:24, where the text reads, “a memorial of blowing of trumpets,” or, a “remembrance blowing.” It is there a summons to sanctification. The reference to the blowing of the trumpets as a memorial before God means that it was a reminder to the people that what they embarked upon had to be governed by the Lord; they went on record as recognizing that fact when the trumpets sounded.

The disappearance of this text from public consideration in church and state is evidence of the extent of our secularization. Now wars are fought with little regard for God’s law. A major target in warfare now is the civilian population. The creation of terror is deliberately sought, and modern warfare is justified as practical. Such a view has no regard for God and His law.

This text is forgotten because men do not see God’s word as their governing law. They mine beautiful thoughts. Books have actually been written with such titles as “nuggets” from Joshua, or Deuteronomy, as though, except for certain verses, the rest is dross. We know that Israel supplanted the work of God with the tradition of men, making the law of God of no effect (Matt. 15:1-9). We know also what God did to Israel for this apostasy. The church had better take heed.

This law did not infallibly avert bad wars. Men are not capable of inerrancy. It did, however, require that men make all decisions in terms of God’s law because God is our Lord and Sovereign.

Chapter Fifteen
From Sinai to Paran
(*Numbers 10:11-32*)

11. And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony.
12. And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.
13. And they first took their journey according to the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.
14. In the first place went the standard of the camp of the children of Judah according to their armies: and over his host was Nahshon the son of Amminadab.
15. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Issachar was Nethaneel the son of Zuar.
16. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Zebulun was Eliab the son of Helon.
17. And the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set forward, bearing the tabernacle.
18. And the standard of the camp of Reuben set forward according to their armies: and over his host was Elizur the son of Shedeur.
19. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Simeon was Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.
20. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Gad was Eliasaph the son of Deuel.
21. And the Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary: and the other did set up the tabernacle against they came.
22. And the standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim set forward according to their armies: and over his host was Elishama the son of Ammihud.
23. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Manasseh was Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.
24. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Benjamin was Abidan the son of Gideoni.
25. And the standard of the camp of the children of Dan set forward, which was the rearward of all the camps throughout their hosts: and over his host was Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.
26. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Asher was Pagiel the son of Ocran.
27. And over the host of the tribe of the children of Naphtali was Ahira the son of Enan.
28. Thus were the journeyings of the children of Israel according to their armies, when they set forward.
29. And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it

you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel.

30. And he said unto him, I will not go; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred.

31. And he said, Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes.

32. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the LORD shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee. (Numbers 10:11-32)

In these verses, we have an account of Israel's journey from Sinai to Paran. Here again we see God's particularity. Even though the generation of that day was in time sentenced to die in the wilderness for their unfaithfulness, God notes their activity. God gives us, after all, the family records of more than a few ungodly men, of the line of Esau, for example. Just as God's judgments far exceed ours, so, too, do His mercies. The God who keeps books keeps total books.

We have a specific account of breaking camp and then moving. First, the tribe of Judah, under Nahshon, son of Amminadab, moved, accompanied by the people of Issachar, then Zebulun. Next, the dismantled tabernacle followed, under the Levitical bearers, the subclans of Gershon and Merari.

Second, came Elizur, son of Shedeur, of the tribe of Reuben, accompanied by the clans of Simeon and Gad and the Levitical subclans of Kohathites.

Third, Ephraim, under Elishama, son of Ammihud, led Manasseh and Benjamin, again three tribes together.

Fourth, Dan, in the rearguard, headed by Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai, led the tribes of Dan and Naphtali.

This move began ten months and nineteen days after the arrival at Sinai (v. 11; cf. Ex. 19:1). We do not now know where Paran was located. It was the home, centuries earlier, of Ishmael (Gen. 21:21, 25:13-15). The name, Paran, survives among some Arab tribes.

The Levites, carrying the ark, were in the vanguard of the march, although they were led by the cloud. The ark and the cloud were thus closely associated one with the other, because the covenant was essential to the relationship between God and man.

The journey was essentially a journey home. Many generations had passed since Jacob went into Egypt, and a family had become a nation. The covenant God, however, had declared that Canaan was their home, and this was *conditional* upon their faithfulness. Because of their disobedience, the generation that left Egypt died in the wilderness. Over the centuries, when Israel was disobedient, the land fell under the rule of foreign powers. The apostasy of the people led finally to the Assyrian captivity of Israel and the Babylonian captivity of Judah. The destruction of Jerusalem followed Judah's rejection of Jesus Christ. None of God's promises are unconditional; it is a perversion of Scripture to say so, as many Arminians and dispensationalists do. Modern antinomianism is very prone to insisting on an unconditional covenant, and such a heresy can

only invoke judgment. It is faithfulness which assures a people of God's presence and guidance on their march and pilgrimage into the future. It was not an easy march. The men were armed and ready for battle. They had, however, the limitation of their women and children. Added to this were the numerous livestock, and the situation consequently became more complex. The journey had to be one mindful of the ongoing need of water periodically for men and beasts and other practical concerns. Journeys similar to this, but with fewer numbers, marked the westward migration in America, and the moves of the Boers in South Africa.

Stops along the way to Paran are mentioned in Numbers 11:3, 11:34-35, and the arrival cited in Numbers 12:16.

In v. 12, reference is made to "the wilderness of Sinai," and also to "the wilderness of Paran." The word translated as "wilderness" is in the Hebrew *midbar*, and it can mean a "pasture" or a "desert," among other things. The term *desert* in the Bible does not have the meaning we associate with it; if we look at an alternate meaning, *pasture*, it becomes apparent that its meaning is uninhabited or uncultivated on any continuing basis. At one time, about a century and a half ago, the American West between the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada mountains was known as the "Great American Desert." In the Bible especially, a wilderness is a place not yet under man's control and development. The first English settlers in New England described it as a "howling wilderness."

In vv. 29-32, we have Moses's invitation to his brother-in-law, Hobab, to accompany Israel into the Promised Land. Hobab was a Kenite, a sub-tribe of Midian which was centuries later absorbed into Israel. His invitation was accepted, according to Judges 1:16 and 4:11 (see also 1 Sam. 15:6). Moses asks Hobab to be Israel's guide on their journey: "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes" (v. 31). This was in no way in conflict with the guidance of the cloud. At every point, Israel needed to know where the best sources of water and grazing would be. Because Hobab was familiar with the region, and none of the Hebrews were, Moses appealed to him to govern them in this respect. The westward treks in the United States by settlers depended on guides who knew where the best water and grazing were, and stops tended to be governed by this knowledge. Hobab was therefore an important addition to the journey.

It should be remembered that Hobab was a foreigner, and yet, by God's providence, he was not only Israel's guide but also a privileged leader. Moses said to Hobab, "...come thou with us, and we will do thee good." As J. Baldwin Brown noted:

God's privileges, the gifts which He bestows, and the advantages which He confers on some are never intended to be exclusive.⁴⁶

This in every age is an urgently important fact. God's purposes encompass all peoples, tribes, races, and tongues. Few things are clearer in Scripture than this. We must therefore recognize, *first*, that God who made all peoples and races has a purpose for all of them. His covenant is not the exclusive possession, nor the unconditional property, of any one people or group of peoples. It is inclusive of all. Man cannot limit what God does not limit. It is a heresy to restrict the covenant to one people. Psalm 87 is evidence of the presence of peoples other than the Hebrews

at the Temple, as is 1 Kings 8:41-43. To treat God's covenant as a national or racial possession is evil.

Second, God's covenant salvation is all of grace, His sovereign grace. God reminds us in His law of the moral depravities of some peoples, and conditions are laid down with respect to their entrance into full covenant status (Deut. 23:1-3, 7-8). At the same time, one law should govern all people (Ex. 22:21, 23:9, 12:48-49; Lev. 19:33-34, 24:22; Numbers 15:14-16, 35:15; Deut. 1:16; 24:14, 17-18; 27:19; etc.).

Third, all covenant peoples are heirs of the grace God gave to their ancestors. The difference between themselves and other peoples is not one of racial inheritance but of covenant grace.

Thus, the covenant people must extend the invitation to all peoples, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." Not the humanistic one-world dream, but only the grace of God can accomplish that good. Moses recognized this and added, "for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel" (v. 29).

The text does not tell us that Hobab agreed. In fact, his first reaction (v. 30) was to return to his own land and his kindred. Apparently, in agreeing finally with Moses, he asked that his people also be included. Moses promised, "...what goodness the LORD shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee" (v. 32). Thus, Moses made it clear that God's bounties would be shared equally. Although many centuries later the Kenites finally disappeared into the Hebrews, no attempt was made to require nor to impede that union. Whereas the humanistic dream seeks to merge all peoples and destroy all differences as invidious, Biblical faith neither draws lines nor obliterates them; it repeats God-created differences, and it centers society on grace, not race.

Chapter Sixteen

Moses's Blessing

(*Numbers 10:33-36*)

33. And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.

34. And the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp.

35. And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.

36. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel. (*Numbers 10:33-36*)

The cloud of God's presence went with the covenant people as they marched. We are told, in v. 34, that it "was upon them by day," i.e., it overshadowed them, so that they were both led by it and also protected from the sun.

We are told in v. 33 that this first stage of their travel was a three days journey. While they rested each night, they did not make camp, since they were moving on in the morning. Normally, the ark was carried by the Kohathites in the middle of the line of march. In this instance, to indicate God's signal blessing, the ark preceded the marchers together with the cloud. Since an enemy might well attack the vanguard of the marchers, the ark *and* the cloud at the front set forth God's protecting promise and power.

We cannot imagine how real God's Presence was in this march. We know that Moses spoke to the ark as to God (vv. 35-36). This was not a normal or a routine fact, but it indicates that God at this point gave a very special manifestation of Himself to Israel. This made, then, the complaints and whining of the people (*Numbers 11:1*) all the more evil in God's sight. T.E. Espin was right in asserting that each forward movement and each period of rest on this journey had a sacramental character.⁴⁷

Central to this text are Moses's prayers or blessings in vv. 35-36. F. B. Huey Jr. observed, "The prayer (of v. 35) seems more appropriate as a battle cry (10:35, cf. Ps. 68:1)."⁴⁸ As a result, Moses's prayer in v. 35 has not been popular. There are, in fact, two things about it that have led some to relegate it to a primitive stage of religion. The *first* is the militancy of the words, "Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered," or, "Arise, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered." The whole of David's Psalm 68 is a development of this prayer. The first eight verses of this psalm give us its spirit:

1. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him.
2. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.

3. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.
4. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him.
5. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.
6. God setteth the solitary in families; he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.
7. O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah:
8. The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel. (Psalm 68:1-8)

God cannot be limited to those things approved by men, i.e., love, mercy, and peace. He is, indeed, as David declares, the God of justice, a protector of orphans and widows, and much, much more. But God is much more than what polite liberals are agreed upon: He is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). To limit God is to deny Him.

Israel wanted God to meet their expectations and to be someone who ratified their hopes and expectations. It was for this reason that, immediately after this, in Numbers 11:1, we read of God's quick and fiery judgment upon Israel. It is popular now among the dispensational and rapture oriented churchmen to speak of God's *unconditional* love for Israel. *There is nothing unconditional about covenant.* It binds a party to total obedience to the covenant law and Lord. The covenant with Israel was broken when Christ was crucified. The covenant is now being broken with many churches for their apostasy, and they face God's judgment. We cannot expect God's blessing if we are unwilling to pray with Moses, "Arise, O LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered." The alternative is to allow them to flourish and to have their way. They then become a curse to us for failing to see what and who God's enemies are. This prayer has been known as "Moses's blessing" precisely because Moses prays for deliverance from the prosperity and success of all God's enemies.

The *second* part of this brief prayer is, "and let them that hate thee flee before thee." It is now an intellectual fashion to decry all *hate*. Supposedly, it manifests a terrible mental state. I once asked a person who condemned hate (although he was very unloving towards me!) if he did not hate murder and rape. His confused answer was that such things should be regretted, and, however strongly we felt about the act, we should condemn the sin rather than the sinner. But sin is not a *thing*; it has no existence apart from man. It is not merely the *act* of man: it is the outworking of the mind and heart of man. As our Lord makes clear,

15. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.
16. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?
17. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. (Matthew 7:15-17)

Our Lord makes it very clear that we can and must judge people by their fruits, by their works and lives. There is a correlation between a tree and its fruits, between a man's heart and his outward life. More importantly, our Lord tells us that it is evil men, false prophets, who wear an outward disguise but are really ravaging wolves in sheep's clothing. It is precisely those men who claim that we cannot know what is in their hearts who are the false prophets.

In Psalm 97:10, we are told, "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil." In Psalm 139:19-22, David recognized that inseparable connection between death and evil, between God's judgment and evil-doers:

19. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me, therefore, ye bloody men.
20. For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.
21. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
22. I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.

In Matthew 5:44 our Lord *commands* us to love *our* enemies. Petty and trivial hostilities are commonplace. We are to pray for such people and love them, i.e., which means obeying God's law in relationship to them (Rom. 13:7-10), because "love is the fulfilling (putting into force) of the law." We are thus told to pray for *our* enemies. Where the enemies *of God* are concerned, we cannot treat their hatred as a minor matter. They are our enemies in a profound sense, if we are God's people, and their enmity is governed by a desire for destruction. We *cannot* be unjust towards them, but we must recognize the fact of a deep enmity towards us.

The second prayer of blessing of Moses is, "Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel" (v. 36). This blessing was pronounced when the ark rested.

Proximity to the ark *and* the pronouncement of these two blessings meant proximity to God, to His consuming fire. Hence judgment came quickly when Israel complained (Num. 11:1). Nearness to God means nearness to both blessings and curses. This is why Peter declares, "judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). The church, the Christian family, and its children thus have a greater liability to judgment than do others, and a greater openness to blessings.

This prayer can be read, "Return, O LORD, unto the myriads of thousands of Israel." Some believe, with good reason, that the "many thousands" refers to families. Individualism and social atomism have not been normal to civilizations but appear in their decline. The basic family unit in Israel was essential to its governmental structure of families under tens, hundreds, and thousands as their ruling courts and powers. This was reflected in earlier English and American hundred-courts. By invoking the presence and blessing of God on the people, Moses also opened them to God's judgments above any judgment against their enemies. Just as privileges involve responsibilities, so, too, God's blessings require that we accept His judgments. It is a mark of antinomianism that it wants only pleasing things from God.

Chapter Seventeen

The Beginning of Complaints

(*Numbers 11:1-9*)

1. And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.
 2. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.
 3. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.
 4. And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a-lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?
 5. We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic:
 6. But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.
 7. And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium.
 8. And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil.
 9. And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.
- (Numbers 11:1-9)

This episode occurs at a place called Taberah, or *burning*, because, we are told, there “the fire of the LORD burnt among them” (v. 3). Hebrews 12:29 tells us, “our God is a consuming fire.” We are given no details concerning this fire. Since it consumed some who “were in the uttermost parts of the camp,” we can assume that it came out of the center, the sanctuary. Fire went out from God in judgment upon the people, to destroy many of them.

The immediate cause of this judgment was the cry, “Who shall give us flesh to eat?” (v. 4). Israel had left Egypt with its livestock. This they apparently did not want to use. They preferred whining to God for a miracle to provide them with meat.

The complaint began with “the mixed multitude,” (of whom more will be said later), the foreigners, and other Israelites, who had left Egypt together. These foreigners were Egyptians and other peoples. Because they were less restrained, these aliens expressed the discontent first, but the blood Hebrews soon echoed it. In fact, we are told, they felt so sorry for themselves that they wept.

John Knox, a man without self-pity, whether a galley slave or a hunted man, declared that God must be judged, not by what He does for us, but by what He says in His word:

I measure not the truth and favour of God, by having or by lacking of bodily necessities, but by the promise which he has made to me. As he himself is immutable so is his word and his promise constant, which I believe, and to which I adhere, and so cleave, whatever can come to the body outwardly.⁴⁹

Israel had been delivered from slavery, and from an effort to destroy them as a people. All they could remember of Egypt was a wretched matter of diet. According to Herodotus, Egypt fed the pyramid workers, and no doubt all its enforced labor forces, radishes, onions, and leeks, a meager diet. Looking back now, they idealized their life in Egypt. They had been fed as slaves. By contrast, they felt, God was not feeding them as well. Their diet was now restricted in the main to manna, and they were already weary of it. They felt entitled to better things than God gave them, and they wept in self-pity.

The taste of the manna was “as the taste of fresh oil,” or, of a dainty dish prepared with oil. According to Exodus 16:31, the taste was like that of wafers made with honey.

The fact that the complaining began among the “aliens” or riffraff is of interest. A people with a strong faith can absorb great numbers of aliens and command their allegiance while converting them to their beliefs in culture. When the faith of the dominant majority wanes, the militant minorities begin to sway and govern it. Israel’s hunger for fresh vegetables, fish, and meat was stronger than its love of God and freedom under God. Israel felt entitled to better than God gave them, and so He gave them judgment. Similarly, mothers have often told weepy and unruly children, “If you want something to cry about, I’ll give it to you.”

However, we should not judge the manna by Israel’s complaints. Asaph tells us, in Psalm 78:22-25, that the manna was “angels’ food” and “the corn of heaven.” The health and preservation enjoyed in the wilderness by Israel makes it clear that Israel’s description of manna was not true. Their professed aversion to it tells us more about them than about manna.

Israel whined about the diet, and then it cried out against God’s judgment. Moses interceded with God, and the judgment was halted (v. 2). The only result, we are told (v. 4), is that they “wept again,” asking, who will provide us with meat? They wanted the best possible diet, not freedom and responsibility.

Israel’s complaint is, “our soul (or, our life or strength) is dried up” (v. 6). This in itself was a lie: they were provided with a superior and nutritious food. They wanted, however, something to appeal to their appetite, and they found God wanting for failing to provide it. Theirs was the sin both of discontent and ingratitude. Given the realities of their situation, they should have been grateful to be alive, and, given the magnificence of their deliverance and providential care, they should have been not only contented but also thankful. Years ago, as a child, I heard someone comment with telling accuracy, as events soon showed, “An ungrateful man is dangerous.”

The word “complained” in v. 1 can be translated as “murmured.” Not the goodness of God but their own desires governed them, so that, when they opened their mouths, they revealed an ungrateful and complaining heart. The fact that their complaints were directed at Moses did not negate the fact that it was God whom they found unsatisfactory. All too much complaining and

murmuring on our part is against Providence. We find God's Providence unsatisfactory, and we therefore complain about particular things rather than openly challenging God and His government. Israel had at Sinai covenanted to obey God and to keep His law. All too quickly, it was clear that they wanted only good from God and no testing or trouble. This complaining spirit remained with Israel, flaring up again and again over the years. For this reason, the older generation was kept in the wilderness for forty years, to die there. God rightly saw complaining as a form of rebellion, and He never rewarded such behavior.

A socialist society rewards complaining, envy, and ingratitude, all things that God hates. The statist order so created becomes steadily anti-Christian, and it corrupts all that it touches.

The word translated as "leeks" apparently means "herbs." Fish were in antiquity especially abundant in the Nile, and they were thus a free part of the people's diet. Because of the plentiful supply of herbs, foods in ancient Egypt were well spiced and were therefore easily made more appealing. These things meant more to the people than God's covenant and their freedom. Their long servitude in Egypt had made them slaves in spirit. We must remember the similarity between a welfare economy or a socialistic state and slavery.

Responsibility is replaced with the expectancy of being helped. A sense of entitlement governs people, and even God is approached with an entitlement mentality. The purpose of God's judgments is the destruction of this evil mentality.

The Septuagint for v. 1 reads, "And the people murmured sinfully before the Lord." St. Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 10:10, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."⁵⁰ God could not build His Kingdom with such a people, and so He destroyed them. Thomas Scott's comment is excellent:

Fallen man is a discontented creature: for having forsaken his proper rest, he feels himself uneasy and wretched how much soever he is prospered or distinguished. Ambition, sensuality, covetous-ness, and malice, are diseases of the soul, which are not abated, but increased, by indulgence: and they who are under the power of them, like persons in a fever, are continually desirous of changing their place or posture: as if *that* were the cause of the disquietude, which indeed springs merely from distemper! While this is the case, every appointment of God must excite secret or open complaint: and though discontent has its abatements and paroxysms; yet there is no cure, till the soul return to its rest, in the knowledge, love, and favor of God, and in a cordial reliance on his wisdom, truth, and power, and in acquiescence in his will.⁵¹

Humanistic scholars regard the Bible as a product of Hebrew culture, and it has become commonplace to write of "Israel's genius for religion." Gleason L. Archer, Jr. corrected this idea, calling attention instead to what he called "The natural Hebrew genius for irreligion and apostasy."⁵²

The term "mixed multitude" is translated as "rabble" by some commentators. The Hebrew text refers to a collection of peoples: the implication is that there was a lack of any cohesive element:

these were people who had come together with no common bond except to complain. The fact that they could dominate all Israel indicates the religious and moral bankruptcy of the people. The temper of a mob can work only where there is no superior or governing faith. A rabble is swayed by the moment's impulse. A people of faith are not subject to such shallow emotions and experiences. They are governed by God.

When I was a boy, Numbers 11:1-9 was a text much preached upon. The *necessity* for a thankful heart was stressed, and the need to see God's Providence in all things. We will continue with the study of this important text because it is so much needed in our time.

Chapter Eighteen

Ingratitude

(Numbers 11:1-9)

1. And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.
 2. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.
 3. And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.
 4. And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a-lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?
 5. We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic:
 6. But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.
 7. And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium.
 8. And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil.
 9. And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.
- (Numbers 11:1-9)

One of the facts very obvious in any reading of the Bible is God's hatred for *ingratitude*. Various words are used to describe this sin: here it is "complained"; in other instances the word is "murmured," and so on. Irving L. Jensen wisely commented on this:

But the sin they brought on was no light matter. This was the sin of murmuring, a sin made up of the two ingredients of unbelief and ingratitude. Unbelief, because the people were beginning to doubt whether God would really fulfill His promises. Ingratitude, for they had already forgotten what a favored people they were and how many blessings were daily coming their way.⁵³

What is especially notable is that God takes note of it, not Moses. Moses had become used to the people's sin, and their whining did not on this occasion irk him especially. God, however, reacted at once with judgment. We are simply told, "the fire of the LORD burnt among them" (v. 1). What this was specifically, we do *not* know. God does *not* regard it as important for us to know anything more than this: God hates and judges ingrates. The comment of Robert A. Watson, almost a century ago, is a classic:

...They (Israel) will have God for their Protector, they will worship Him; but let Him make their life smooth. Much has had to be borne which they did not anticipate; and they grumble and speak evil.

Generally men do not realize that their murmuring is against God. They have no intention to accuse His providence. It is of other men they complain, who come in their way; of accidents, so called, for which no one seems to be responsible; of regulations, well enough meant, which at some point prove vexations; the obtuseness and carelessness of those who undertake but do not perform. And there does seem to be a great difference between displeasure with human agents whose follies and failures provoke us, and discontent with our own lot and its trials. And at the same time, this has to be kept in view, that while we carefully refrain from criticizing Providence, there may be, underlying our complaints, a tacit opinion that the world is not well made nor well ordered. To a certain extent the persons who irritate us are responsible for their mistakes; but just among those who are prone to err our discipline has been appointed. To gird at them is as much a revolt against the Creator as to complain of the heat of the summer or the winter cold. With our knowledge of what the world is, of what our fellow-creatures are, should go the perception that God rules everywhere and stands against us when we resent what, in His world, we have to do or to suffer. He is against those who fail in duty also. Yet it is not for us to be angry. Our due will not be withheld. Even when we suffer most it is still offered, still given. While we endeavor to remedy the evils we feel, it must be without a thought that the order appointed by the Great King fails us at any point.

The punishment of those who complained is spoken of as swift and terrible. “The fire of the Lord burnt among them, and devoured in the uttermost part of the camp.”⁵⁴

Whether we are a Moses or an ordinary believer, we must see God’s Providence in every situation, so that even the evils which seem to surround and threaten to overcome us must be viewed as a God-sent opportunity to grow in Him. We may prefer to have God remove them to spare us the grievous problem, but God sends them to enable us to become better priests, prophets, and kings under Him.

We are told that the complaints came from all the camp, including the uttermost reaches of it. It came from “the mixed multitude” *and* from “the children of Israel” (v. 4).

They were dissatisfied with manna. They wanted the fish then so abundant in the Nile, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic so easily grown in Goshen. For them, God’s deliverance should have been from bondage to wealth and plenty. In Exodus 16:3, Israel had complained at the lack of food. Here they complain about the lack of variety. The word translated into English with two words, *mixed multitude*, is in the Hebrew *asaphsoph*; it appears only once in the Bible, and it means *riffraff*, or, *rabble*. It therefore cannot be equated with the term “mixed multitude” as used elsewhere in the English Bible and referring to the foreigners who joined Israel. It no doubt included many such persons, but it applies to *all* the riffraff, whether Hebrews or foreigners. We are then told that Israel as a whole joined them in weeping over their lot, in whining over their diet. In vv. 7-9, we are given an account of the manna, and

the variety of ways in which it could be prepared. By God's grace and Providence, they were freely given a highly nutritious food daily. Their response was to complain, weep, and whine.

It is very important to notice that the whining began with the riffraff and then spread to everyone else. *Influence* is a very powerful factor in any society: it is exercised by the strongest. If there be no sizable minority of determined, vocal, and strong men, then the riffraff become the determining power in that society.

As of 1988, there were ninety-one million adult Americans, eighteen years of age and older, who identified themselves as "born-again Christians," up from forty million in 1968, twenty years earlier. Unless those ninety-one million begin to command society for Jesus Christ, God will account them to be riffraff in His sight. The use of the word "riffraff" here, its only usage in the Bible, is not an accident: it is God's word.

In this crisis, with death in the camp, Moses prayed earnestly to God, and God answered Moses's prayer. The name of this place was called Taberah, meaning "a burning." The people had been ungrateful, discontented, and complaining, and God gave them a real cause for grief, death in the camp. This was, however, simply the first of several expressions of ingratitude. Moses here and later acted as the intercessor with God for Israel. Intercession is futile where there is no confession, repentance, and a renewed heart. Israel finally had to die in the wilderness, leaving the younger generation to enter the Promised Land. The two exceptions were Joshua and Caleb.

Verse 1 tells us that the people "complained"; this is both an accurate and inaccurate rendering; what we are literally told is, "the people (is) as those who complain about evil."⁵⁵ God's Providence is adjudged evil because life is not on their terms. Notice that "the people cried unto Moses" (v. 2), not directly to God. Their complaining had been against God, but Moses was somehow required to prevail again with God on their behalf. The miracle of God's patience is an amazing and great one.

The reference to garlic is of interest, in that its use was common to much of the Mediterranean world, but not to the Romans. As a result, the Romans despised the garlic-eating people, and they especially showed contempt for the Jews for their use of garlic.⁵⁶ Curious reasons have been used to justify racial hatred.

Of the people's complaining, Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz has said very bluntly, "they were looking for a pretext to remove themselves from God."⁵⁷ They wanted deliverance not only from Egypt but also from God. This is a very important observation. People want God to deliver them from their human problems and oppressors and then leave them free to live their lives as they please. This is the essence of antinomianism, and the reason for its very great appeal. This complaining and ungrateful generation was sentenced by God to die in the wilderness, although they were not told of this judgment until later.

Joseph Parker observed that the people began with complaining and went on to "lusting" (vv. 1, 4); the word "lusting" means *desiring*. They not only complained against God but also went on to an agenda in their hearts and minds as to what God should do for them if He really loved

them. They had declared at Sinai their assent to none other gods, but now their own will or desire was their god. As Parker said:

To criticize Providence—who is fit for that high judgment? Providence is a large word; it is like the horizon, encompassing all things with a line that cannot be touched, including all things, yet without bond or token of humiliation. Who can criticize the Providence of life—that marvellous power that lights up the world in the morning, curtains it off with a veil of darkness night by night, blesses its soil with fertility, fills its channels with streams and rivers, feeds the roots of its tiniest flowers, paints the wings of its frailest insects, leads like a cloud by day and like a fire by night, that numbers the hairs of the head of every child living in the Father's house? Who has mind enough, penetration enough, judgment enough, to call God to his bar and pronounce sentence upon the infinite? We are vexed by details; we are blinded by the immediate dust of the road. We are not called to judgment, but to acquiescence, to acceptance, to gratitude, to hope. To criticize God is to usurp the divine throne. Let who will pass their insane judgments upon the infinite scale of life; let it be ours, where we cannot understand, to believe; where we cannot direct, to accept, and in all things to kiss the rod and bless the Hand that lifts it. This is not the surrender of reason; it is the baptism and consecration of understanding.⁵⁸

What this means is that every trying situation gives us an opportunity for growth in the Lord, whereas rebellion destroys us. St. Paul, who underwent trials, torture, and hostilities as very few men ever have, is also the man who speaks more powerfully against the complaining spirit. He says, for example, in Philippians 4:11, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” At one time, Numbers 11:1-4 was commonly used as a necessary lesson for Christians.

In vv. 1-3 the fire of judgment is mentioned, but without any details. We simply know that the camp was struck with judgment. We know only two facts about this fire, and they are of tremendous importance. *First*, Israel had for its protection and guidance *the pillar of fire* by night and the cloud by day. To God's faithful people, this pillar was a guide and protection. It set forth God's presence to defend and protect His chosen people. *Second*, as Hebrews 12:29 tells us, “our God is a consuming fire.” To the unfaithful, to the apostate, to the ingrates, and to all who despise God's blessings, God is a consuming fire. We have reference again to God's destructive and final judgment on the ungodly in the Last Judgment. Its intensity and finality is given with vivid imagery in Revelation 20:10, which refers to “the lake of fire.”

We must remember that the complaining of the people was about manna, God's gracious provision. They whined, “But now our soul is dried away” (v. 6), because all they had to eat was manna. They were only a little more than a year away from slavery, and their attention towards God was one of vicious ingratitude. They felt sorry for themselves! Years ago, after much dealing with sinners, I realized that basic to all of them was *self-pity*. Life was unjust to them because neither God nor man appreciated them. As a result, I began to tell all such persons that the worst cancer of all is self-pity: it destroys all who insist on indulging in it. Certainly it destroyed the generation that left Egypt.

Chapter Nineteen
Rebellion Against God
(Numbers 11:10-23)

10. Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.
11. And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?
12. Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?
13. Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.
14. I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.
15. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.
16. And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.
17. And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.
18. And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat.
19. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days;
20. But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?
21. And Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month.
22. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?
23. And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not. (Numbers 11:10-23)

The burden of dealing with an ungrateful people was becoming intolerable to Moses. The fire of God's judgment had nearly destroyed many of the people, but they were again weeping with

self-pity over their lot (v. 10). Moses was weary enough to long for death to relieve him of this burden of leadership over a nation of ingrates. Moses felt that he, a man, was in effect being required to be a wetnurse to a nation of babies. The image is deliberately an impossible one: how can a man be a wet-nurse to a whole nation of cry-babies (vv. 11-12)? The demand of the people lacked all common sense. Their herds of livestock were in the main needed for breeding stock in the Promised Land. Only an occasional one could be used for meat. They were demanding continuous miracles from God and Moses, miracles designed to satisfy their demands. Their attitude was, if we are God's chosen people, then we should have abundant supplies and no problems. Like so many since, they had a fairy-tale belief in God, not a living faith.

Moses, in praying to God, called attention to two problems. *First*, there was the demand of the people for meat. How could he meet that? God promised a miraculous answer which would supply Israel with a month's supply of meat. At the same time, it would be a judgment upon them all, so that God's apparent blessing would become a curse.

Second, coping with all the complaints of the people was exhausting Moses. He was weary enough to long for death as a relief. Earlier, the system of elders had been established. (The root of the word "elder" in Hebrew means "bearded one.") These were men who ruled over Israel, an elder over ten families, elders over hundreds, and then thousands, with seventy elders at the top (Ex. 24:1, 9). Now God declared that, by His Spirit, He would empower the seventy elders who presided over all Israel to enable them to help Moses bear the burden of the people (Num. 11:16-17). Their duties had previously been familial and tribal; now they were to assist Moses in the religious government of all the people.

Moses had prayed for God's help. God's answer directed him to human help, hardly the answer Moses wanted. However, if God's people were going to grow, they would have to learn to govern themselves under God. The seventy elders became a partial blessing to Moses; the meat God soon gave to the people proved to be a curse. *We cannot ask God's miracles to replace human responsibilities without judgment.*

In v. 21, Moses refers to 600,000 men he must deal with; these are the heads of families. Feeding them all meat seemed an impossible task.

Some armchair scholars are very critical of Moses's prayer. They see him as having committed the same sin as the people. It is obvious that God did not see things that way! We are told in v. 10 that "the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly." If God felt that way, would He expect Moses to react with sweetness and light? Where God does not condemn Moses, it is presumption and sin for men to do so. Yet one commentator goes so far as to speak of Moses's "tantrum."⁵⁹ Others are not as harsh, but too many seem to believe that Moses should have been a Stoic. The simple fact is that Moses was weary, and he felt inadequate for the task of dealing with an ungodly people.

As we shall see in the verses that follow our text, the seventy elders brought in to assist Moses were above all else filled with the spirit to prophesy (vv. 24-27), to proclaim God's word to all who were near. Thus, their first and foremost task was to witness in the Spirit to God's requirements and to support the testimony of Moses. Since these seventy elders were called by

God to assist Moses, it follows that their prophesying was to declare God's judgment on Israel for rebelling against God and Moses. Nothing God did through these men had any purpose other than to support and uphold Moses, and the word of God through Moses. It was anger over that authenticated word that led soon thereafter to the rebellion headed by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram as leaders of 250 princes (Num. 16:1- 3). The premise of the rebels was that their word was as good as the word of Moses and the seventy elders.

Sin is sin wherever it occurs. In Numbers 11:4, we see that the sin began in the riffraff; it continued on through all Israel, and it included important princes. Lesser abilities do not excuse sin, nor greater abilities and status. Sin is always sin in God's sight and without excuse.

Superficially, the issue here was food. The people complained about manna and vividly recalled their diet in Egypt. If we accept their version, we join them in their sin. Sinners always have reasonable and logical explanations for their actions and demands. They are adept at using reason to vindicate sin. God tells Moses to tell the people what their real sin is: "... ye have despised the LORD which is among you" (v. 20). Our Lord declares, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). The people knew that God was in the camp in a special way; Christians no less know the promise of Matthew 18:20. In both instances, the conclusion of God is the same wherever a complaining and whining spirit prevails: Ye have rejected or despised the Lord (Num. 11:20).

When God declared that He would provide meat for all the nation, Moses was startled, and he reminded God of the number of families involved. God was patient with Moses because Moses was not showing unbelief but bewilderment. God's answer was short and to the point: "Is the LORD's hand waxed short?" (v. 23). God who had sent ten plagues on Egypt, parted the Red Sea, destroyed the Egyptian army, and fed His people with manna, could also provide them all with meat. As our Lord tells us, "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27).

Israel, to prepare itself to receive the meat God promised, was required to sanctify itself to be ready for the meat which would arrive the next day (v. 18). While Moses told the people of this requirement, we are not told whether or not they complied (v. 24).

According to John Urguhart, an area was discovered which was probably the camp site of this incident. About forty miles from Mount Sinai there are indications of a large and ancient encampment, with remains extending for miles around. Evidences were found of many graves.⁶⁰

Israel at this point resembled too many modern societies: it wanted all the advantages of slavery at the same time as freedom. Slavery, whether called socialism or anything else, offers security, whereas freedom requires responsibility and is full of risks. *The slave mentality will distrust freedom under God.*

To return to the requirement of sanctification or consecration before the meat was given, the promised meat was God-provided, miraculously given, and, as N.H. Snaith commented, it "is a sacred meal and the people must be ritually clean in order to eat it (cf. Gen. 35:2; Ex. 19:10)." This is "a sacred meal, but one for punishment and not for new life and strength."⁶¹ *It was a form*

of communion, and therefore of judgment because of their ungodliness. There is an apt comment on this in the Apocrypha, *The Wisdom of Sirach*, 39:27:

All things prove good to the godly,
Just as they turn into evils for the sinful. (Goodspeed trans.)

Thomas Scott very aptly described Israel's problem at this point, while warning us of a like sin:

Fallen man is a discontented creature: for having forsaken his proper rest, he feels himself uneasy and wretched how much soever he is prospered or distinguished.⁶²

Scott's comment tells us also why a chapter once popular with preachers is now neglected; discontentment and whining are now too often seen as evidences of sensitivity by "noble" souls.

God's judgment on Israel was not a gentle one. According to v. 20, for a whole month they would have meat but would also be smitten with an ailment which would have them vomiting violently even through their nostrils. God is obviously not the Person of sweetness and light some would prefer Him to be. Years ago, I heard one profane and blasphemous man say of the God revealed in this and like passages that He sounded like a mean and lean Scotchman! Perhaps he had John Knox, a man he detested, in mind. At any rate, he now, no doubt, knows more about the matter, having most likely died himself.

Chapter Twenty
The Holy Spirit and the Elders of Israel
(Numbers 11:24-30)

24. And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.

25. And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

26. But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.

27. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

28. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

29. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

30. And Moses gat him into the camp, he and the elders of Israel. (Numbers 11:24-30)

At God's command, seventy elders had been chosen to assist Moses in the government of Israel. These men did so serve during the wilderness journey. They were no doubt at times of some real help to Moses. They were to bear the burden of government with Moses, under him (v. 17).

But a grim fact intervenes here. All seventy of these men perished in the wilderness; they were among those sentenced to die for their apostasy. Yet these men were at this point possessed by the Spirit of God; they gave vent, the text indicates, to ecstatic utterances and preached with what Kennedy called "a holy frenzy."⁶³ These were clearly charismatic experiences, but they were no assurance of salvation. Even Balaam and Balaam's ass could prophesy on occasion, but this gave them no assured place among God's elect.

Israel was denying God's mercy and the value of His miraculous manna: they were ungrateful people. God now was about to judge them in two dramatic ways. *First*, the seventy elders were overcome by the Spirit of God so that they transcended their normal selves. This was a very real and a very dramatic event. It witnessed to the power of God, not to the salvation of the seventy. It meant their greater condemnation in God's sight. *Second*, besides the supernatural experience of the seventy elders, we have reference to the miracle of manna, and then, in vv. 31-35, to the miracle of the quails. Not one of these three supernatural facts brought any awareness of God and His requirements of them to Israel. Although Moses died in the wilderness near the edge of Canaan, we are told of his faith; Caleb and Joshua, because of their faith, entered Canaan. We

are told plainly of the unbelief of all the others of the older generation, and God's judgment on them, in Hebrews 3:17-19:

17. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

18. And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

19. So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

What we see plainly is that a man's life may be marked by miracles greater than any we know, and by charismatic experiences like those of the day of Pentecost, and, because of unbelief, he can go to hell more quickly than others. The test is a faith that bears fruit. "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:20). We must remember that King Saul also was possessed by the Holy Spirit on an occasion or two (1 Sam. 10:10-12; 19:24). This did not make Saul a saint of God.

Two of the seventy elders, Eldad and Medad, had remained in camp for some reason, but they too were subjected to the same experiences. When this was reported to Moses, Joshua was concerned and said, "My lord Moses, forbid them" (vv. 26-28). It is commonly held that Joshua was envious and spoke for that reason. Joshua, who was present apparently with Moses, simply was upset that two men who had not come to the sanctuary should apparently be prophesying. The unconcern, real or not, of Eldad and Medad with the summons to the sanctuary concerned Joshua.

Moses recognized Joshua's concern. "Enviest thou for my sake?" (v. 29). Do you feel that my authority is diminished because God's Spirit came on these two men independently? "Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them" (v. 29). The absence of Eldad and Medad meant that the people in the encampment were witnesses also to this supernatural event. This made their subsequent blindness all the more evil.

To understand these verses more clearly, we need to remember that in vv. 16-18, God requires two things of Moses. *First*, the seventy elders must be called together, to receive of God's Spirit; *second*, the people must sanctify themselves because on the morrow God would give them meat to eat. God is thus making it clear that, if manna is an insufficient witness to you of my providential mercy and care, then two further miracles will reinforce the people's condemnation, the possession of the seventy elders by the Holy Spirit, and the miraculous provision of the quails. The plague that struck them then was God's judgment for their willful blindness to His providential deliverance and care. The calling of the elders and the provision of the quails is thus essentially related to the plague which followed. No matter what God did, the people were ungrateful and blind to His mercy.

It does tell us much about the character of Moses that he rejoiced on hearing that even the absent Eldad and Medad were ecstatically praising God. Joshua was fearful of a separate center of authority from Moses and God's sanctuary being created by this event, but Moses expressed his delight. Israel was marked by the sins of discontent and ingratitude, but not so Moses.

The charismatic utterances of the seventy elders were not repeated on other occasions, although they continued for some time on this particular day. These were ecstatic rather than predictive utterances.

The charismatic utterances *and* the quail which came the next day were *both* miraculous gifts of God, and both were judgments on Israel because of their ingratitude. We are plainly told that the Spirit was put upon the people by God: it involved neither faith nor grace on their side, anymore than it did with King Saul. It was not a subjective experience but an objective fact; it said nothing about the men who received the Spirit other than the fact that God made a witness through them.

When God is described in Exodus 20:5 as a jealous God, it means one who “maintains His rights.”⁶⁴ We are His creatures, and, as His property, He can give us gifts or recall them at will.

God was thus maintaining His rights in the events of Numbers 11. He gave His people, as evidence of His mercy, manna, the gift of the Spirit, and the quail. At the same time, He sent throughout the camp a consuming fire, death, and, later, a plague. God as a jealous God maintained His rights as against a people who were ungrateful and complaining. What could have been signal blessings became curses.

We are told, in 1 Samuel 15:22-23,

22. And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou has rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

These words were spoken to Saul, who had been given charismatic experiences.

Men can at times be lifted above their normal character and abilities by a variety of things. Here the cause is directly from God, and it is supernatural. Seventy men become for the day greater than themselves. The true test of a man, however, is his day by day faithfulness: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.”

It is a mistake, therefore, to regard this episode as a spiritual high mark, any more so than what happened to King Saul. We have contemporary analogues to this in revival experiences of some people; during World War II, more than a few young men had “foxhole” experiences or “conversions” which subsequently not only proved to have no valid results, but also led to contemptible attitudes on their parts. God in granting these seventy elders the experience He did was thereby compounding their reprobation.

This chapter in my childhood was seen differently than it is now. Perhaps this was because almost all the preachers I heard, including my father, were Armenians, and they were not given to a sweetness and light theology.

We need urgently a return to the meaning of Numbers 11.

Chapter Twenty-One

The Plague and the Quail (Numbers 11:31-35)

31. And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth.

32. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

33. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.

34. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted.

35. And the people journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah unto Hazeroth; and abode at Hazeroth. (Numbers 11:31-35)

The quail described in these verses was a member of the partridge family which wintered in Africa, and still does. In the spring, this quail flew to the peninsula, and, at least to the beginning of this century, did so in very great numbers. Their annual migration was comparable to that of the passenger pigeons, who came into the American Midwest in such great numbers that they broke the branches of trees where they lighted, as well as covering the ground. We are told that these particular quails made long flights, always flying with the wind to make it easier to cross the Red Sea. They would land exhausted, in huge, fluttering heaps, in clusters as much as three feet high. The birds came from the south, but, according to Psalm 78:26, they were blown to their place near Israel's encampment by an east wind.

Then quails landed on either side of Israel's camp, about a day's journey. Since such migrations of birds often darkened the sky, it was readily clear to Israel that they were near. To this day, these quails are easily caught in the Sinai Peninsula at the time of their northward migration.

There are various estimates as to how many bushels an homer then equaled. One thing is clear: even those who gathered the least had an abundant supply of meat. The birds would be picked clean of their feathers, cleaned, and then dried in the sun. Anyone who has eaten quail knows it to be a prized delicacy. They of Israel who had wept for meat now had it, but, before they have even chewed it, we are told that God "smote the people with a very great plague" (v. 33). The plague came not from the quails but from God for their ingratitude.

Earlier, in Exodus 16:13, we are told of quail alighting around the encampment; on that occasion, there was no curse as in this incident. The name of this place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, meaning "the graves of lust," or of ungodly desires, greed, and demands of God.

We have here a series of providential events or miracles. *First* (v. 31), the wind brought the quail to precisely where Israel was. They could have landed many miles away. *Second*, the quails came in great numbers to this particular area instead of spreading out for countless miles. Some scholars claim that the reference to “two cubits high” (v. 31) refers to the height at which the quail were flying, i.e., low and close to the ground, and therefore easily caught or clubbed. In either case, we have a providential event. Then, *third*, this blessing is turned into a curse by God. Where men are ungodly, the Lord will use even blessings to curse them, as in this instance.

The people gathered this fat variety of quail for two days and the intervening night. Here indeed was a remarkable windfall that supplied them with meat for a full month.

But God’s gift became His means of judgment. What the people wept and whined for became for many of them death. This was a warning to the survivors, but it was not heeded. The people justified their sins as rightful demands against God. Some have tried to explain away this event, long remembered in Israel’s history, as a case of food poisoning, but such a naturalistic interpretation does violence to the text. The people had a strong sense of entitlement; as God’s chosen people, they were supposedly entitled to whatever would best satisfy them. God indeed ruled that they had an entitlement, but it was to death.

It is a curious fact that there seems to be a very real correlation between ages of tyranny and times of doubt. When people seem ready to view casually the bombing of innocent civilians, the existence of slave labor camps, street crimes, and injustice on a great scale in the courts, they are most readily indignant at the thought of God punishing anyone. The rationale behind this is that men, however much they complain, are more ready to tolerate human injustice than God’s justice. The reason is a clear one: in a world where major evils escape punishment and justice, men believe that their many sins, petty or great, can go unpunished and unnoticed. I recall a homosexual professor who said cynically, to a group of associates, while I was in an outer office, that justice was the demand of hypocrites; nothing would be more intolerable than a world of public and complete justice. Very few people are that honest. The fact is that most people seem quite content with injustice; it provides them with a more congenial world.

However, because God is the Creator and Lord over all, His justice eventually and always prevails, in time or in eternity. Because Israel was then God’s chosen people, it came upon them more quickly. Both Israel and the church today, by claiming to be God’s chosen people, are thus more readily prone to be judged by Him.

The quail had landed exhausted from the flight, a fact common to some bird migrations. The scene was to Israel like a great windfall from God: exhausted birds, easy kills, women and children collecting the clubbed birds to pluck and gut them before setting them out to dry, and one and all happily looking forward to an abundance of meat.

They had not been thankful for deliverance from Egypt, nor for the daily miracle of manna. Now God gave them their desire, and made it a curse to them.

Although the quail are not normally long-distance flyers, they do make this annual migration. Whether going north or south, they land exhausted and are thus easily killed. When killed in

numbers as on this occasion, they are, after being gutted and plucked, salted and then dried in the sun.

In Psalm 78:21-32, we are told of Israel and this judgment, “For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works” (v. 32). They insisted on seeing God’s miracles as natural occurrences, including the manna. In Psalm 106:13-15, we have another reference to this event:

13. They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel:
14. But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.
15. And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

The reference here is to a particularly grim curse: “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.” We live in a time when God has sent leanness into the souls of countless peoples.

According to C. J. Elliott, in the expression, “the LORD smote the people with a very great plague” (v. 33), the words “smote” and “plague” are cognate in the Hebrew and refer to “pestilence or any epidemic sickness.”⁶⁵

As we have said, this was a supernatural judgment. Such large harvests of quails were common, and no ill effects normally followed. According to Athenaeus, in Egypt vast numbers of peoples regularly killed and salted the quail for future use.⁶⁶ The Israelites obviously had done the same while in Egypt, and they quickly responded to the opportunity. It was in Egypt an annual and a natural event, and they assumed it to be the same on this occasion. Fallen man wants constantly to reduce God’s providence to naturalistic events. The reason for this is clear: “Nature” has no court of judgment, whereas God does.

Morgan said of this event,

Here a principle emerges which is of perpetual application and importance. It is that there are times when God grants an unwarranted request in order that men may learn through experience the folly of their desires.⁶⁷

This sounds good, but it is not a Biblical concept. Men do not learn their basic lessons from experience but from God’s grace. Certainly the later history of Israel shows very clearly that they learned nothing from this experience. It is God through Moses who terms this site “the graves of greed, or, lust,” *not Israel*. Their sin was their continuing failure to learn from experience! Israel sought its will rather than God’s; it paid a price for doing so, and it learned nothing from the experience. John Gill, writing some generations ago, noted that in this day, in Italy, on the coast of Antium, “within a month, in the space of five miles, 100,000 quails were taken every day.” According to Pliny, in some parts of Ethiopia, such quail provided the people with enough meat for a year.⁶⁸

All this tells us why both Israel of old, and commentators today, insist on viewing these quail and the plague naturalistically. To do so removes moral responsibility. The plague then just “happened,” as did the quail. This tells us, too, why the modern concept of historiography is sure

to further blindness. In a world where things happen by chance, or naturalistically, both meaning and morality are discarded. This is, of course, intentional.

In v. 35, we are told that Israel soon journeyed to Hazeroth, which means “enclosures” or “settlements.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

The Demand for Equality

(Numbers 12:1-16)

1. And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.
2. And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.
- 3.(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)
4. And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.
5. And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.
6. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.
7. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.
- 8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?
9. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed.
10. And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.
11. And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.
12. Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.
13. And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.
14. And the LORD said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again.
15. And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.
16. And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran. (Numbers 12:1-16)

We have in Numbers 12 a sin related to Numbers 11, where ingratitude is the reason for God's judgment. Here it is envy. Apparently, Zipporah, Moses's wife, had died; although her father and brother were godly men, Zipporah lacked their faith, or at least their faithfulness, and she gave evidence of pettiness and was a problem to Moses. Moses had remarried an Ethiopian, or, more

accurately, a Cushite woman, of a group apparently related to the Midianites, Zipporah's people. Zipporah's influence on Moses had been of no account. Miriam and Aaron, his sister and brother, were those close to Moses and therefore capable of influencing him. Now there was another woman in the picture, one more agreeable to Moses and more truly a helpmeet. The result was envy. Miriam was clearly the leader in this, and Aaron, who had once before, in the golden calf incident, proven to be a weak man, again proved himself to be a weak follower.

As a result of the marriage, both Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses. They challenged his primacy as God's chosen man: "Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" (v. 2). This was partially true. In many instances, God speaks to both Moses and Aaron, but He always speaks *primarily* to Moses. In Exodus 15:20-23, Miriam is called a prophetess, one who speaks for God, as she leads all the women in their celebration of God's deliverance. There is a reference to both Aaron and Miriam in Micah 6:4, indicating God's use of them. The preëminence of Moses is, however, very obvious.

In v. 3, Moses is referred to as the meekest man in all the earth. The sentence is in parentheses, having been added to the Mosaic text by God's appointed helper. The word translated as "meek" has an inappropriate connotation at times in English, as does the word "humble." We think at times of the hypocritical Uriah Heep of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*. This is a radical perversion of its meaning, and it warps all of Scripture. Walter Riggans, a Scottish commentator, has called attention to the four inflections of meaning in this word *meek*:

- (a) poor, needy (e.g. Deut. 15:11)
- (b) powerless, without influence (e.g. Amos 2:7)
- (c) oppressed by the powerful (e.g. Ps. 10:17)
- (d) therefore, those who rely solely on God in life (e.g. here, Ps.37:11; Zeph. 2:3; Matt. 5:5).⁶⁹

This is accurate but can be misleading unless we see this meekness, this poor, powerless, and oppressed condition, as coming from God and leading to a sole trust in Him. In this sense, the word "meek" has been defined as meaning broken to harness, trained and made useful by God for His purposes. In this sense, then, a meek man can be strong and forceful in dealing with the ungodly because he is under God's discipline, not man's. What is now identified as meekness means subservience to man, not to God. When our Lord tells us, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5), He means that those broken into usefulness to Him rather than to subservience to men are those who shall inherit the earth.

God refers to Moses in v. 7 as "My servant Moses." This is a title given also to Abraham in Genesis 26:24, and to Caleb in Numbers 14:24. The prophets are also so termed, and Jesus Christ is the great Servant of the Lord (Isa. 53:11).

Moses found himself unready to deal with this envy from the two so close to him, Miriam and Aaron. Miriam, older than himself, had been important to him since childhood. God therefore spoke for Moses, "suddenly," we are told (v. 4). All three were summoned to the door of the sanctuary where God ordered them to face the truth. God's anger was very clear (v. 9). Where all prophets and visionaries other than Moses were concerned, God made His word known through

a revelation or a “dream.” The word translated as “dream” has also the meaning of a binding, or a dumbness, whereby the person was silenced so that God might use him or her. All to whom God gave such an experience were on a lower level than Moses, to whom God spoke directly because he “is faithful in all my house,” completely loyal to God and His Kingdom. God said that He spoke to Moses “mouth to mouth,” as friend to friend, plainly and familiarly, not in “dark speeches” (v. 8). How dare they speak against Moses? In doing so, they spoke against God.

When the cloud lifted from the sanctuary, it became at once apparent that Miriam was suddenly far gone with leprosy, eaten up with it. Aaron, however, was not so afflicted. Miriam and Aaron were thus both publicly put to shame, Miriam with her leprosy, and Aaron because he had none. It made it clear that Miriam was the main offender and that Aaron, as in the golden calf episode, was a weakling. He was in effect of no account and thus shamed as a nonentity in the situation. Hers was a physical humiliation, his a spiritual one.

At this point, Aaron spoke more like a man. He confessed their guilt, and begged that it be not laid upon them, i.e., spare us from our folly. Entreat the Lord for us, he asked of Moses (vv. 11-12). Aaron thereby confessed also the priority of Moses, against which they had recently spoken. Aaron’s description of Miriam’s changed appearance compares her to a premature birth or a miscarriage.

Moses immediately prayed to God for Miriam’s healing. God’s response is especially important for the church of our time to understand. In v. 14, God tells Moses, if her father, or, the father of any woman, spat in her face, would she not hide herself for a week out of shame? This refers to a public act of contempt. If a daughter, a wife, or a son shamed his father, such an act would be a public disavowal of any relationship, or, at the very least, his public disgrace and separation until restitution and repentance were made. Miriam had to reside outside the camp, separated from her family and all others, until a week ended, and then she rejoined the camp cleansed.

Some commentators have said that Aaron was not stricken with leprosy because he was the high priest and therefore “necessary.” But it was God who made Aaron high priest, and He could raise up another man to that office. There are no necessary people in God’s sight, and to believe so is madness.

Verse 9 speaks of the *anger* of the Lord, a burning anger, some have termed it. Because the sin of Aaron and Miriam had been a public offense, God subjected them to a public humiliation and judgment. Some have seen the sin of Miriam and Aaron as an example of racial prejudice. If this had been the case, it would have been shown towards Zipporah much earlier. It was rather a resentment against anyone other than themselves having a closeness to Moses. It is clear also that, whereas Moses was ready to forgive and forget, God was not; hence the seven days of shame, and a mild rebuke to Moses for asking for an immediate restoration. In Otto Scott’s words, “God is no buttercup.” God here shows mercy, but not without a penalty.

We must now, in the light of all this, turn again to v. 3 and the reference to Moses as a meek man. Philip J. Budd refers us to Psalm 25:9 for its meaning: “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way.” Psalm 37:11 is similar, and we have it in Matthew 5:5, the blessed meek who shall inherit the earth. Budd notes, “The word is often used

of a trustful attitude.... The point here seems to be that Moses is not self-assertive.”⁷⁰ He was a forceful man, but he was not an egotist. It was God’s glory, not his own, that concerned Moses.

This is why God asks Miriam and Aaron, “wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (v. 8). What Moses had not taken as an insult, God saw as an insult to Himself.

What Miriam and Aaron had done was to claim *equality* with Moses, and God found this offensive. This false claim to equality is another aspect of Numbers no longer preached about. We have, since the French Revolution, come to regard equality as a great virtue, even as a humanistic inequality was seen as a social necessity prior to that revolution. What God requires of a society is justice; men want that their will, whether equality or inequality, be done. Here, the pretension to equality with Moses was an insult to God, and He took vengeance. To build a society on equality or inequality is injustice: we must build in terms of God’s justice. Envy governs our time as a pretended virtue, as equality. God asks in every instance, why are you not afraid? Such a sin strikes at the foundations of social order and reduces a society to lawlessness and anarchy. Older commentators, like Professor W. Binnie, called the action of Aaron and Miriam “sedition.”⁷¹ None condemn it so now that equality and envy have become major political virtues. Again we see why Numbers and the other books of Moses are bypassed in our antinomian era.

God made Miriam unclean because of her envy and her demand for equality, and He shamed Aaron, who now appeared as hardly a man. Watson’s comment of a few generations ago is more appropriate than ever:

Modern society, making much of sanitation and all kinds of improvements and precautions intended to prevent the spread of epidemics and mitigate their effects, has also some thought of moral disease. Persons guilty of certain crimes are confined in prisons or “cut off from the people.” But of the greater number of moral maladies no account is taken. And there is no widespread gloom over the nation, no arrest of affairs, when some hideous case of social immorality or business depravity has come to light. It is but a few who pray for those who have the evil heart, and wait sympathetically for their cleansing. Ought not the reorganization of society to be on a moral rather than economic basis? We should be nearer the general wellbeing if it were reckoned a disaster when any employer oppressed those under him, or workmen were found indifferent to their brothers, or a grave crime disclosed a low state of morality in some class or circle. It is the defeat of armies and navies, the overthrow of measurers and governments, that occupy our attention as a people, and seem often to obscure every moral and religious thought. Or if injustice is the topic, we find the point of it in this: that one class is rich while another is poor; that money, not character, is lost in shameful contention.⁷²

In Watson’s day, politics and economics were seen as the means to the salvation of society. The consequences of that false hope are all around us.

In Psalm 94:20, the psalmist asks,

Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law?

Men have enacted evil by laws, legalizing equality and inequality, ingratitude, and envy, and then they wonder why evil prospers.

We see again why this chapter is neglected. No doubt, if some feminist learns of it, she may use it to “show” how “sexist” and “antifeminist” the Bible is! The concern of the Bible, however, is with God’s salvation, with sin, His justice, grace, and mercy.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The Spies

(Numbers 13:1-33)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.
3. And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men were heads of the children of Israel.
4. And these were their names: of the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur.
5. Of the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori.
6. Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.
7. Of the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph.
8. Of the tribe of Ephraim, Oshea the son of Nun.
9. Of the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu.
10. Of the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi.
11. Of the tribe of Joseph, namely, of the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi.
12. Of the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli.
13. Of the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael.
14. Of the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi.
15. Of the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi.
16. These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.
17. And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:
18. And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many;
19. And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds;
20. And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes.
21. So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath.
22. And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)
23. And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.
24. The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence.

25. And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.
 26. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.
 27. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.
 28. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.
 29. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.
 30. And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.
 31. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.
 32. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.
 33. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.
 (Numbers 13:1-33)

We have here another account of unbelief. As Israel approaches the Promised Land, spies were sent in to spy out the land. Twelve men were chosen, one from each tribe (vv. 3-16). These spies apparently divided into two groups; according to vv. 17, 22-23, some went by way of the south; in v. 21, it would appear that some entered Canaan from the wilderness of Zin, south of the Dead Sea, and from there to Hamath.⁷³

Of the twelve spies, two were godly and faithful men, Caleb, of the tribe of Judah (v. 6), and Joshua (or, Oshea), of the tribe of Ephraim (v. 8). The other ten men proved to be cowardly and faithless. Their names, however, are carefully recorded for us; they are names of infamy, permanently recorded in the Bible. They are a reminder to us that God forgets nothing. The Bible is not a record of sweetness and light.

Verses 3 and 17 tell us that Moses, “by the commandment of the LORD” (v. 3), sent out these spies. However, at this point we are not told of an important fact that appears years later. In Deuteronomy 1:20-46, Moses gives a more detailed account of the matter. There were three aspects to the decision to spy out Canaan. *First*, the people took the initiative. Their excuse in approaching Moses was that the mission of the spies would have as its purpose military strategy, to find out “by what way we must go up” (Deut. 1:22). This was a lie to deceive Moses and to cover up their fearfulness. An invasion was required, and they had no stomach for one unless it would be very easy. They were concealing cowardice in the name of strategy. *Second*, Moses took their reaction and statement at face value: “the saying pleased me well” (Deut. 1:23). He was apparently greatly encouraged by their seeming resolution and their readiness to face up to

the responsibilities ahead of them. *Third*, God, of course, knew the cowardice of the tribes or clans. He commanded Moses to go ahead with the plan. By this means, God brought into the open Israel's unbelief. In Watson's words, "Always and everywhere, *faithless* means foolish, *faithless* means cowardly."⁷⁴ A great and strong people can become foolish and cowardly and lose all their resolution and power through faithlessness. Although the historical documents are fragmentary and contradictory, it was said of one ancient empire that the decision of enemies to attack and destroy it came when they saw the effete luxury and apparent homosexuality of its ruler. Watson was right: courage and the willingness to make a stand are not genetic but moral facts. Many a civilization has collapsed when its faith waned.

Canaan at that time was very different from the present Palestine. It was in many areas well-wooded and well-watered and capable of supporting considerable populations through its farming and ranching. A key area visited by the spies was Hebron, about twenty miles south of Jerusalem and a very ancient center of civilization. Its antiquity is cited in Numbers 13:22; Hebron antedated an ancient Egyptian city.

The names of some of the peoples who lived in Canaan are given in vv. 28-29. The Anakim are referred to in various texts as a very tall people. The Amalakites were a particularly vicious and militant people whom Israel had already encountered. There were various nations of Amalekites at the time. The Hittites are well known to scholars of ancient history; their center was elsewhere, but they were entrenched in Canaan also. The Jebusites held the Jerusalem area, while the words Amorites and Canaanites refer to the longstanding peoples of the land. In v. 33, the reference to "men of great stature," the Nephilim, means peoples of a giant race. Such references were regarded as mythological prior to the time that explorers encountered the giant Watusis of Africa.

Caleb is an interesting person in many ways. He is here referred to as a member of the Judah clan. In Joshua 14:6 and 14, he is called Kenezite, a clan related to Edom (Gen. 36:11, 15, 42). The Kenezites were absorbed into the tribe of Judah. Thus, while Caleb's Kenezite father was Jephunneh, Caleb is also listed as a son of Hezron of Judah, a subclan he had been made a member of.

The reputation of Canaan in antiquity was one of exceptional fertility. It is described as a land flowing "with milk and honey" (v. 27); the term is a symbol of "peace and plenty." The honey could be date honey or wild-bee honey. In a fertile, well-planted land, with hills covered with wild flowers and shrubbery, wild honey would be very plentiful. Milk meant, of course, dairies and also butter and cheese, very basic foods in much of history. The Greeks used the term "milk and honey" to describe the food of the gods; it is a term common to antiquity.⁷⁵

The report of the ten faithless spies had four aspects. *First*, they reported on the amazing fertility of the land. They brought back with them grapes, pomegranates, and figs as evidence of the high quality of the farming products. We are told of one cluster of grapes, on a single branch of a vine, which was carried on a staff by two men. To the modern mind, this sounds like hyperbole, because men today are ignorant about farming. The common summer grape in California is the Thompson seedless grape. As it appears in markets, it is twice the size of any such grape we might grow in our garden. By a process of girdling the branches, the grapes are force-fed into

growing dramatically in size; the flavor of the ungirdled grapes is better, but, for marketing, girdled grapes alone will sell normally. When I was a boy, occasionally, with a garden vine, a farmer would strip the vine of many bunches or clusters of grapes and thereby produce a bunch or cluster of very great size. Such huge clusters have now no market value, so we do not see them. Smaller families, too, limit the amount the consumer wants.

At any rate, the products brought back by the spies were very impressive and were a witness to the productivity of Canaan.

Second, these faithless spies had another motive in bringing back so huge a bunch of grapes, and so superior a kind of pomegranate and fig. They were in effect saying, If you think these are big, wait until you see the size of the people! Not all the people of Canaan were “men of great stature” (v. 32), but this is what they stressed in order to intimidate the people even as they themselves had been. They reported, “And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which came of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (v. 33). This is vivid imagery, and very deceptive. A man can step on and squash a grasshopper: there is no contest between them. This is exactly the intention of the image: it reflects the people’s cowardice. They still preferred slavery in Egypt to fighting for freedom. Being faithless, they were empty men. James Moffatt’s rendering of Jeremiah 2:5 is very telling. God declares through Jeremiah,

What did your fathers find wrong in me that they went far from me, went after empty idols and became empty themselves?

Men who self-consciously choose evil have a strength for a time, but men who are lukewarm and pharisaical are marked by impotence.

Third, there is a strange statement in v. 32: “The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof.” Moffatt renders it as “a land that starves its inhabitants to death.” This paraphrase does not jibe with the description of Canaan as a land flowing with milk and honey. The literal reading is that the land eats up its inhabitants. The question is, what does this mean? This means, according to Wenham, that people “tend to die due to the hostile environment.” This was a false report, and the law of Deuteronomy 19:16-21 later summarizes the penalty for false reports. In Numbers 14:37, we read that these ten cowardly spies died of a plague as a judgment for their cowardly report. So, too, did all the people, other than Joshua and Caleb, before the entry into Canaan. The death they feared in Canaan, they met in the desert.⁷⁶ According to Maarsingh, the reference to the land eating up its inhabitants can refer generally to war, disasters, infectious diseases, anything.⁷⁷

Fourth, in v. 28, we read that the spies reported that the walled cities were impregnable. There was no possibility of anything but defeat. It would therefore be unwise to think of any kind of assault on Canaan. Defeatism was written into the minds of the ten spies, as well as cowardice, and they refused to present any option except retreat. To fight was out of the question. At every stage of their deliverance, Israel had been presented with miraculous answers. They apparently now wanted no more miracles: no miracles, no more on their part. This was faithlessness, and it asked for God’s judgment.

Caleb had another report, a very brief one: “And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (v. 30). The response of the ten faithless spies was “an evil report” (v. 32). “The original for ‘bringing up an evil report’ is in Prov. 10:18 rendered ‘uttering a slander.’”⁷⁸ They were slandering the God who had delivered and led them. In Numbers 10:9, God had promised them,

And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.

God thus promised to bless Israel with success in any war conducted in terms of His law or at His command. All this meant nothing to the people.

Forty days had been spent by the spies in Canaan. Apparently only Caleb and Joshua thought in terms of military strategy; the others reacted with fear.

Archeological research of Canaanite sites of the era indicates that the fearful spies were correct about the strong fortifications of that age.⁷⁹ These spies, however, left out the degenerating morale of these peoples, and, even more, the power of God. God had commanded that Moses agree to the spying venture; it was a test of the people’s faith. They obviously preferred to be ruled by the fear of man rather than the fear of God, and this is a mark of the slave mentality. The world is always full of difficulties, and it is absurd and foolish to hope otherwise. We must see all difficulties in terms of God’s law and government, His sovereign purposes.

The twelve spies were clan leaders, not necessarily the head men by any means, but important men. They were thus in the main fairly representative of Israel, whereas Caleb and Joshua were not. What Israel demonstrated was not a religious fear but an ungodly fear, a fear of man, not of God. With this episode, Israel’s opportunity to enter Canaan in that generation ended. They had proven themselves to be true slaves, not God’s free men, and they were shortly thereafter sentenced to die in the wilderness. Their unbelief was a rebellion against God, a form of revolution. History is a long account of man’s revolution against God and His law, and God cannot lose in this war, nor can man win.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The Cowardice of the People

(Numbers 14:1-25)

1. And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.
2. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!
3. And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?
4. And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.
5. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.
6. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:
7. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.
8. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.
9. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.
10. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.
11. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?
12. I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.
13. And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;)
14. And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.
15. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying,
16. Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.
17. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my LORD be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,

18. The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.
19. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.
20. And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:
21. But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.
22. Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;
23. Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:
24. But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.
25. (Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) Tomorrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea. (Numbers 14:1-25)

This is a devastating account of the “chosen people” mentality, whether in Israel or in the church. God’s election or choice of any people or group is an act of sovereign grace on His part; to presume on that fact is to invite judgment. Ungrateful people constantly remake the past in terms of their own imagination. Israel here said, “Would God we had died in the land of Egypt!” In Egypt, they had been slaves; their newly-born male sons had for a time been routinely killed in order to eliminate them as a people, leaving only girls to be made harem slaves. This policy was finally dropped for unstated reasons, probably because the need for labor levies for massive construction work emphasized the need for more male workers. Again, some said, “Would God we had died in this wilderness!” (v. 2). They would rather have been dead than alive to face and conquer an enemy. As Matthew Henry observed, they charged God with malice and hypocrisy in bringing them to the borders of an apparently formidable enemy.

Their solution was a simple one: “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (v. 4). Slavery was better than freedom. Israel was hostile to the responsibilities of freedom. They were at least open about their preference for slavery. In 1964, living then in Palo Alto, California, where wealth and economic security were commonplace, I was surprised by the number of people of means who voted for Lyndon B. Johnson for president rather than Barry Goldwater because they believed Goldwater would imperil their future Social Security checks. Some of these people were notable churchmen.

In v. 5, we are told that Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the congregation. Speech had been exhausted by then, so their recourse was now prayer. Some peoples, especially Moslems, still pray in this manner; at that time, it meant a prayer of desperation. The normal attitude of prayer in Biblical history was standing. This prostration meant grief and despair. The response of the two faithful spies was that they “rent their clothes” (v. 6). This was a very well known public expression of dissent on hearing blasphemy; in Jeremiah 36:24, we are told that God indicts the leaders of Judah for consenting to the destruction of Jeremiah’s prophecy by

King Jehoiakim; the king, as he heard it read, cut it up with his penknife and tossed it into the fire. We are told, “Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.”

Moses and Aaron had exhausted themselves in pleading with the people. They would not listen to God’s word through Moses. As Noordtzi commented,

...What Israel does now is show contempt; they do not consider it worth the trouble to look to Him or listen to Him (cf. I Sam. 2:17). It is a not believing in Him, *i.e.*, a failure to see Him as the Reliable One on whom man can always depend under all circumstances.

But in doing this Israel has lost its right to exist. What Israel is, it owes to the Lord. If it severs every tie with Him, then it turns toward its own ruin.⁸⁰

At this point, “the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel” (v. 10) to pass a death sentence on them. Prior to this, Caleb and Joshua had tried to reason with the people. Their argument was, *first*, Canaan was an extremely rich and fertile land, a land flowing with milk and honey (v. 8). We have covered it carefully, and we know how good it is, they reported. *Second*, as for the Canaanite peoples and city states, however seemingly impressive, “they are bread for us: for their defence is departed from them” (v. 9). Their *defense* is departed is, literally, their shade, their protection, is gone. These peoples had been under Egyptian rule. Without that military protection, they were now unprepared for an attack. “They are bread for us,” *i.e.*, we will eat them up. Therefore, “fear them not” (v. 9). This was an astute and accurate analysis. *Third*, the critical fact for us is God’s blessing: He is the determining power. If you rebel against Him, He will be your real enemy.

The reaction of the people was to plan at once to stone to death Caleb and Joshua. Suddenly, however, the glory of the LORD, His fiery presence, appeared in and about the sanctuary. God speaks to Moses alone. The people had provoked Him with their faithlessness in the face of all His miracles. “I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee (Moses) a greater nation and mightier than they” (v. 12). To an extent, God did smite Israel; all those twenty years old and older died in the wilderness. He summoned great men out of the Hebrew ranks in the centuries ahead, but the nation as a whole gained judgment again and again.

Moses at this point interceded with God. His argument was entirely based on the character of God, not on anything in Israel. *First*, God’s honor required the continuation of Israel, lest the Egyptians and Canaanites dismiss God’s miraculous works as a fluke. For God not to take Israel into Canaan after all that Moses had declared in Egypt would be difficult for Moses to explain. *Second*, Moses reminded God of His own self-revelation as *both* merciful and just. Moses by no means understates God’s justifiable wrath:

18. The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

19. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou has forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.

Moses agrees with God's indictment but asks for mercy towards Israel for the Lord's sake, not Israel's.

God's forgiveness is a limited one. All over twenty will die in the wilderness for their lack of faith. Only Caleb (v. 24) and Joshua (v. 30) would enter Canaan. In Noordtzij's rendering of the latter part of v. 23, "No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."⁸¹ They had distrusted God, and they would pay the penalty for it.

By planning to elect a new leader, and to return to Egypt, they were "completely rejecting the whole plan of redemption."⁸² As Wenham so tellingly states it,

To believe in God means to accept all he says and to act accordingly: to trust his promises and obey his commands. Faith makes a man to be counted righteous before God (Gn. 15:6): its absence damns him (*cf.* Num. 20:12). In this instance God proposes destroying Israel and starting afresh with Moses and his descendants (12).

God could easily have done this; nothing is impossible with God. Moses, in his desire for God's glory, pleaded for mercy towards Israel.

In a very real sense, God did set Israel aside. When we examine the Davidic ancestry, and that of Jesus, we find foreign women therein, including a prostitute, Rahab (Josh. 6:25; Matt. 1:5). The ancestry of our Lord manifests God's grace, not Israel's chosen privileges.

The *hatred* of God for sin is very real, and it must be an unforgotten fact.

J. H. Newman's sermon on v. 11 says, among other things:

Hard as it is to believe, miracles certainly do not make men better; the history of Israel proves it....

Why should the sight of a miracle make us better than we are? (1) It may be said that a miracle would startle us, but would not the startling pass away? Could we be startled for ever? (2) It may be urged that perhaps that startling might issue in amendment of life.... but why is a miracle necessary to produce such effects? Other things startle us besides miracles....

What is the real reason why we do not seek God with all our hearts if the absence of miracles be not the reason, as assuredly it is not? There is one reason common both to us and the Jews: heartlessness in religious matters, an evil heart of unbelief; both they and we disobey and disbelieve, because we do not love.

In another respect we are really far more favoured than the Israelites. They had outward miracles; we have miracles that are not outward, but inward.⁸³

What Israel wanted was not God but miracles guaranteeing security. “Slavery under Pharaoh with some measure of security seemed preferable to freedom under God with its uncertainties and responsibilities.”⁸⁴ This is why politics has replaced Christianity as the central concern of many peoples. Politics succeeds by promises of security, which is another way of saying slavery. The slave may or may not have a good life, but the slave has cradle to grave security.

Slave revolts are simply destructive, because the slave’s vision rarely extends beyond security. This was the second time God had spoken of destroying Israel. We see this first in Exodus 14:12; it is referred to in Psalm 106:23. In Jeremiah 15:1, we are told,

Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth.

The Babylonian captivity followed.

A key aspect of evil men is their intense self-pity. In v. 3, they complain that God has led them to the border of Canaan “to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?” This is an amazing statement. The Egyptians were very prone to seizing attractive girls, boys, and women from subject peoples; it was a common act in that era. Yet now Israel accuses God of planning to do the same to them. Self-pity had turned to viciousness. Fear had made them fools.

There is a grim irony in v. 4, “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.” As D. Young observed years ago, “They could call a man a captain, but that would not make him one.”⁸⁵ According to the heresy of democracy, leaders are made by the vote of the people rather than by faith and character. The results for the twentieth century have not been good.

According to v. 25, God declares,

(Now the Amalakites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) Tomorrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea.

Because Israel was now barred by His sovereign decree from entering Canaan for a generation, they were ordered back into the wilderness. They were to avoid the valley ahead, because God would no longer bless them with victory. This was a command which they again chose to disregard.

Chapter Twenty-Five
The Judgment on Hypocrisy
(*Numbers 14:26-45*)

26. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,
27. How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.
28. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:
29. Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,
30. Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.
31. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.
32. But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness.
33. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.
34. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.
35. I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.
36. And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land,
37. Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD.
38. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still.
39. And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly.
40. And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned.
41. And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper.
42. Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.
43. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you.

44. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

45. Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah. (Numbers 14:26-45)

God sometimes punishes people by giving them what they want. Earlier (14:2), Israel had said, "Would God we had died in this wilderness." God gave them what they asked for. The grim prediction that the entire rebellious generation, other than Caleb and Joshua, would die in the wilderness is repeated four times (vv. 29, 32-33, 35). God kept His word: they all perished outside of Canaan. "The Lord held the rebels to their own word."⁸⁶ The spies had spent forty days in Canaan, schooling themselves into petulant rebellion, and so God gave them forty years in the wilderness.

Verses 26-35 are addressed to both Moses and Aaron, but the Hebrew of vv. 28-29 seems to indicate Moses primarily. God returns contempt for Himself with contempt for an ungrateful people.

The ten faithless spies were at once stricken by a plague and died (v. 37). These men were all leaders in their respective tribes and clans. Their death made it clear that God was not to be trifled with, that He spoke bluntly and earnestly. No one who had treated God with contempt would be spared. There were 600,000 male adults in Israel, and the judgment extended to them all, except for Caleb and Joshua. None were spared on the grounds that they had not been vocal in their complaining. God requires us all to make a stand, and we cannot hide our cowardice in a mob. No exceptions were made, although, no doubt, many felt that an exception should be made in their case.

In vv. 35-38, God emphasizes the fact that His judgment is irreversible. On no account would He alter His decision. Israel refused to believe that God was any different than themselves. Even as they easily changed their minds, they assumed that God would do the same. Moreover, they reckoned without God's omniscience and power. God declares, in Psalm 50:21,

These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

What men do in secret, God reveals to them and to others openly. God did not allow Israel to forget this incident; it is the subject of much of Numbers 32. Moses reminds the younger generation of this in Deuteronomy 1:20-46. In Psalm 95:8-11, again we have a blunt reference to this apostasy, and also in Psalm 106:21-24. Since the Psalms were Israel's songbook, they were compelled to sing about their sinful past even as they praised God.

In Amos 2:10 and 5:25, there are general references to this event. However, in the New Testament there are also reminders of this event as a part of the church's past which must not be made an aspect of its future (1 Cor. 10:1-11). It is an event also stressed in Hebrews 3:7-4:13.

Access to the land is a blessing, and Deuteronomy 28 stresses this fact. In our urban era, we tend to forget that all human life is land based. To separate a people from the land, or to lay a blight or drought on the land, is a severe judgment on men. Blindness to this fact is a sign of intellectual pride and arrogance, and a forerunner of disaster. We live in a time when the importance of the land is not understood. As an arrogant girl rebel of the 1960s, at the University of California, said, "Food is." Such foolishness begs for judgment.

In v. 27, God calls Israel "this evil congregation." Being a nominally covenant people no more made them good than calling a church "Christian" makes it good when it despises God's law-word. God did not give either the ten spies or the adults of Israel an opportunity to repent. His patience is not eternal. Hebrews 12:15-17 tells us that, after a time, God allows no repentance to stand.

When God required them to move forward, they drew back in fear of battle. Israel wanted perpetual miracles; God had declared that in His Providence the land would be theirs. They wanted a ready-made solution, whereas God was leading them into a providential opportunity. Their problem was unbelief. They could not believe that the God who delivered them from Egypt could take them into Canaan. Unbelief always justifies itself by accusing and indicting God. Israel charged God with malice, hypocrisy, and deception (vv. 1-4). As Moses reminded them years later,

And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us. (Deut. 1:27)

Their sin was not merely fear of the Canaanites but also doubting God. There is no victory for such men.

In v. 33, Israel's behavior is called "whoredoms," and therefore God in v. 34 declares, "ye shall know my breach of promise." Because of their behavior, God's promise had been voided. They were now impotent men. Having abandoned God, God abandoned them. This is now the problem with men, churches, and nations in the Western world. They are deserters expecting to be treated as princes, and the world will soon trample them underfoot unless they first submit to God.

False repentance is deadly. We see in v. 40 an example of this. Now the fighting men were going to prove to God and to Moses that they were repentant: "Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned." This was not repentance but disobedience. They thought that an attack on Canaan would commend them to God and repeal His death sentence.

They were commending themselves to God by disobedience disguised as an act of faith. They were simply trying to avoid the consequences of their sin. It seems ironic and amusing now, but at the beginning of the twentieth century, Paul Ehrlich (1854-1915) was hailed as one of mankind's greatest benefactors for finding a cure for syphilis. It was believed that now humanity could indulge in "free" sexuality with impunity. Now, however, instead of two forms of venereal diseases we have more than twenty-five.

Israel was concerned with the *consequences* of its sin, not the *fact* of contempt for God's promises. Their statement, therefore, that "we have sinned" (v. 40), was pragmatic, not religious. As one contemptible husband finally said, on being confronted again and again with his many and serious sins, "Okay, so I sinned. Now can I go home to my family?" This was Israel's attitude.

Moses was not fooled.

41. And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper.

42. Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.

43. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword; because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. (Numbers 14:41-43)

This was a tardy attempt to follow the counsel of Caleb and Joshua, but it was a false repentance.

The attack was made, and it was a disaster. Moses and the ark remained in the camp; God was not with the army, and, apparently, neither were Caleb and Joshua. The Amalekites and the Canaanites defeated them and chased them off with serious casualties.

Calvin, in dealing with this episode, called attention to the root problem, unbelief, and he stated clearly that there is no success for men who disobey God. He added,

And yet, so does hypocrisy blind men's minds, that they imagined they were correcting and compensating for the evil which they doubled. Moses then relates how they received the reward which they deserved; as much as to say, that, although they might be slow to learn, still they were made acquainted, by the reverse which they experienced, how fatal a thing it is not to obey God: for fools never learn wisdom except beneath the rod.⁸⁷

Robert Young's *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* reads, in v. 45, "And the Amalekites and the Canaanites who are dwelling in that mountain come down and smite them, and beat them down – unto Hormah." Very literally, the Israelites were hammered to pieces. It was a crushing and humiliating defeat, and it came from God.

The significance of this event was not lost on some of the rabbis. Rabbi Akiva said that the wilderness generation lost both in this world and in the world to come, although not all rabbis agreed with him.⁸⁸ Turning again to Psalm 106:24, we have a plain explanation for the events of this chapter: "Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word." The marginal reading for "the pleasant land" tells us more vividly what Canaan was in that era: it reads, "a land of desire." Their self-will lost them a highly prized realm. Our modern ideas of Palestine are very remote from the ancient reality. The Turks denuded forests everywhere, destroyed brooks and streams, and turned many an area into a desert. It was then, however, "a land of desire."

God had exposed the hypocrisy of Israel, and He pronounced sentence upon it. He will no less judge and destroy the hypocrites of every era.

Chapter Twenty-Six
The Land and the Faith
(*Numbers 15:1-21*)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you,
3. And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto the LORD, of the herd, or of the flock:
4. Then shall he that offereth his offering unto the LORD bring a meat offering of a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of oil.
5. And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt offering or sacrifice, for one lamb.
6. Or for a ram, thou shalt prepare for a meat offering two tenth deals of flour mingled with the third part of an hin of oil.
7. And for a drink offering thou shalt offer the third part of an hin of wine, for a sweet savour unto the LORD.
8. And when thou preparest a bullock for a burnt offering, or for a sacrifice in performing a vow, or peace offerings unto the LORD:
9. Then shall he bring with a bullock a meat offering of three tenth deals of flour mingled with half an hin of oil.
10. And thou shalt bring for a drink offering half an hin of wine, for an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.
11. Thus shall it be done for one bullock, or for one ram, or for a lamb, or a kid.
12. According to the number that ye shall prepare, so shall ye do to every one according to their number.
13. All that are born of the country shall do these things after this manner, in offering an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.
14. And if a stranger sojourn with you, or whosoever be among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD; as ye do, so he shall do.
15. One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for ever in your generations: as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD.
16. One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you.
17. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
18. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you,
19. Then it shall be, that, when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall offer up an heave offering unto the LORD.
20. Ye shall offer up a cake of the first of your dough for an heave offering: as ye do the heave offering of the threshingfloor, so shall ye heave it.

21. Of the first of your dough ye shall give unto the LORD an heave offering in your generations. (Numbers 15:1-21)

These laws give us an account of various offerings required of Israel. There are three sections to this chapter. The *first section* begins with v. 1, the *second* begins with v. 17, and the *third* begins with v. 37. These laws seem out of place in Numbers because Leviticus has more to say on the laws of sacrifice. All three sections are similar, especially the first two, which both say emphatically, "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, *when ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you,*" then there are certain things you must do. Certain rites and offerings are then required.

God had just told Israel that they would die in the wilderness, all who were over twenty, and they would leave behind a host of unmarked, unattended graves. Now He gives orders concerning certain offerings to be required on their arrival in Canaan.

The importance of this cannot be overestimated, in terms of both Israel and us. God had cut off the hope of entry into the Promised Land by all the mature Hebrews: they had no future *personally* as far as Canaan was concerned. Their children and grandchildren would, however, receive Canaan from God. Because the parents were all going to die did not exempt them from being future oriented. Their thinking could *not* be governed by their life span but only by God's promises.

We are today as then governed too often only by our life span. As a result, our politics is governed by the moment. Early in the 1970s, California State Senator Bill Richardson told me that, except in rare instances, neither voters nor legislators were influenced by anything beyond ninety days in the past or the future. When I spoke to the state senators, about thirty of them, on hard money, I found virtually all better informed on the economic catastrophe facing the United States than almost any group in the country. Their one concern was, when will this happen? On learning that it could be some years ahead, they relaxed: it was then of little concern to them.

Here God reminds a generation which will die *outside* of Canaan that it must think about life in Canaan, and of God's requirements of their children there. If we are not future oriented, we are suicidal.

The text deals with offerings of lambs, rams, and bulls, with cereal offerings of flour, oil, and with drink offerings. These are free-will offerings (v. 4), and they represent aspects of their daily life and sustenance. What we offer to God must represent what is basic to our lives. The idea that worship is unrelated to daily life and is something apart from it is alien to Biblical faith and a perversion of it. A man who can work for a corporation, or a newspaper, for many years without anyone knowing him to be a believer is not truly a believer. Faith is expressed, not by mere words, but by the substance of our lives.

There is a gradation in the offering. There must be a proportion. Thus, a man offering a ram, the medium sized offering, had to give proportionately more fine flour, oil, and wine than one who gave a lamb, whereas he who gave a bullock had to give the most flour, oil, and wine. In other

words, while the gifts were free-will offerings, they could not be given falsely, i.e., bringing up a large animal but stinting at what was less prominently displayed.

These are fellowship or peace offerings, food offerings rather than burnt offerings. At the moment, God's wrath is against an entire generation, but they are told that their children can anticipate peace with God.

When we look again at the key texts, we see the phrase, "when ye come into the land." All of creation is the work of God; every sphere of life is under law. Not only is man under God's law, but so, too, is all His creation. The relationship of law to land is spelled out in Deuteronomy 28. We live off of God's earth, and the first requirement of us is to obey His law and to use the earth's bounty to praise Him. The environmentalists reverse the order to require a praise of the earth by man, and their law is the value of natural life *per se*, totally apart from God and man.

The people had in effect turned their hearts and minds away from the Promised Land. They are told that this cannot be done without judgment.

In vv. 17-21, with respect to the heave offering, the first of the newly threshed grain was to be used. Unlike the fine flour specified earlier, this is to be freshly ground meal, still somewhat coarse. In other words, it was to be truly the firstfruit, given as soon as possible, as a reminder of God's priority. Ronald B. Allen compares this cake or bread made of the first grain to the once common framed first dollar a man made in his newly established business.⁸⁹ This was to be the first-kneading of bread; it belonged to the priesthood when offered.

Verses 13-16 are especially important because they state clearly, "One law and one manner (or, regulation) shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you" (v. 16). There could not be another or a lesser law for foreigners living among them. They could not be members of the covenant apart from the covenant law. The terms of the faith are set by God, not by man. The only ground for differentiation among peoples has to be the Lord and His law, not race or nationality.

Three terms are used in vv. 15-16, in the Authorized Version: 1) ordinance, 2) law, and 3) manner (or regulation). Walter Riggans rendered these as 1) law, 2) ordinance, and 3) statute. The *first* is the Hebrew *Torah*, God's revelation to His people. This tells God's people what God's covenant law and purpose are. The *second, ordinance*, means an authoritative ruling, or justice. It has reference to vindication, to a final ruling. The *third, statute*, has as its root meaning "to engrave," and it "indicates an absolute principle or rule."⁹⁰

God's law is the law for all peoples, because God is the Creator of all. These verses tell us that the law determines who truly is a covenant believer, so that foreigners could be covenant members when Hebrews were not. The ground is shifted emphatically from blood to faithfulness.

Similarly, because there is one law for all, there is one grace for all. No subordinate status was given to non-Hebrews who became covenant believers.

This at once takes us back to our starting point. These laws were given to Israel, even though they were condemned to die in the wilderness, to make them future oriented for their children's sake. The future they would not see would all the same come. Although most of them were of Abraham's seed, *perhaps*, the promises of God rested and always rest on His covenant law and grace rather than on blood. God has one law and one grace for all men and nations, and we sin if we think otherwise.

God's plan and promises do not rest on men nor on nations. When Israel failed, it was set aside, even as some churches and peoples have been since then, and will be in the future.

God must be our priority. "Of the first of your dough ye shall give unto the LORD an heave offering in your generations" (v. 21). This means giving and serving God, not when we feel we have enough time or money left over to do so, but with our firstfruits. The large number of professing believers in the United States today represent in the main persons to whom God is not the priority but rather an afterthought.

Our faith is land based and person based. Man was created and placed in a garden to learn there how to work and to exercise dominion under God. To reduce the faith to only spiritual concerns is to try to turn Biblical faith into some other religion. The mystery religions of the Roman Empire were popular because they offered escape from a notoriously corrupt world. Those who spiritualize the Bible, as many have done from Gregory of Nyssa to Scofield, simply create thereby an alien faith which invokes Christ while dishonoring Him.

The promise of God is, "when ye come into the land." His curse was captivity in their land to alien peoples, and, finally, the Babylonian Captivity, separation from their land. The spiritualized religion of too many churches represents impotence and anti- Christianity.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Sins, Unpremeditated and Premeditated (*Numbers 15:22-41*)

22. And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD hath spoken unto Moses,
23. Even all that the LORD hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations;
24. Then it shall be, if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour unto the LORD, with his meat offering, and his drink offering, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering.
25. And the priest shall make an atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them; for it is ignorance: and they shall bring their offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their ignorance:
26. And it shall be forgiven all the congregation of the children of Israel, and the stranger that sojourneth among them; seeing all the people were in ignorance.
27. And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering.
28. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him.
29. Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them.
30. But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.
31. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.
32. And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.
33. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.
34. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.
35. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.
36. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.
37. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

38. Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue:
39. And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:
40. That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.
41. I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God. (Numbers 15:22-41)

The subject of these verses is, *first*, unintentional or unpremeditated sins by individuals or the congregation (vv. 22-29); then, *second*, sins of premeditation, presumptuous sins (vv. 30-36); and, *third*, the requirement of manifesting one's faith (vv. 37-41).

In the *first* grouping, unpremeditated sins, in v. 24 it is said that these are done "by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation." Very literally, these are sins committed "by wandering off."⁹¹ By a separation, whether physical or mental, a person can isolate himself from God and God's law-word and reality. He can then blunder into sins great or small.

If this unpremeditated sin involved the whole community, a young bull had to be offered for a burnt offering, together with grain and drink offerings and a sin offering (vv. 22-24). There was forgiveness for the people, because a) the sin was not premeditated, and b) because atonement was made. On becoming aware of their lawlessness, the people repented. If they did not do so, the sin remained as guilt.

All sin requires atonement, whatever the manner in which it was committed, but this does not necessarily mean forgiveness by God. Mere ritual atonement did not suffice of itself. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:17). The differences between unpremeditated and premeditated sins are very real. One aspect of the difference can be seen in the distinction between manslaughter and murder; the one is accidental, the other deliberate.⁹²

This law had to apply equally to Israelites and aliens residing in the land. No excuse could be made for aliens on the ground of a lower moral or cultural state (v. 26). Contrary to the modern view of nationality, in antiquity religion was basic to membership in a society. David, for example, was partly of Moabite blood. Men of power around David included Hittites, Ammonites, Zobahites, and even Philistines from Gath (2 Sam. 15:18-19).

The law makes it clear that "God's holiness cannot be in any way compromised." Moreover, forgiveness does not result because the necessary sacrifice has been made but only because of God's free and sovereign grace. God does not permit the sanctuary to become the atoning power; it is merely an instrument used by God and man. The rite does not *cause* atonement: God's grace alone does that, but He requires us to show our sorrow and repentance plainly.⁹³

Ronald B. Allen has cited these verses as illustrative of the relationship between law and grace. He rejects the notion that God's law (as distinguished from man's law, the tradition of the elders) is impossible to keep. God knows our frame (Ps. 103:13-17; 1 Cor. 10:13), and He knows what we can and cannot do. When we fail, He provides the means of restoration. "Therefore we conclude that in the Torah God speaks in grace; in the most exacting law there is mercy, and in all the Torah the intention is to know Him and to relate to him."⁹⁴

In the *second* section, the concern is with sins of premeditation, presumptuous sins. We have a statement of what this sin is in vv. 30-31, and in vv. 32-36, an example of such a sin. Men who commit such sins do so in arrogance and pride; they show contempt for God and His word. What God says is for them nonsense, and they may even deliberately and flagrantly violate God's law to declare its meaninglessness. Instead of worshipping God, they defy Him; some such men have, over the generations, defied God to strike them dead for their law-breaking.

We have in Matthew 12:32 our Lord's reference to the unforgivable sin. The specifics of the sin are not given. It is not merely an act but also the spirit of radical contempt for God and an inversion of all moral order. Such men break a law because it is God's law, to show that for them evil is good, and good is evil. God cannot legislate for them, they hold. It is in effect not only denying God but also declaring that man as his own god can do as he pleases.

At this point there is an important aspect to this law. Many, in fact, most of God's laws can only be enforced by God: virtually all the offenses against God are punished by Him in His providential time or in eternity. Very few offenses directly against God are punishable by man. In this instance, God *requires* punishment by man because the fundamental order of all society is at stake. God is the only valid ultimate source of all law, and anyone who strikes at God's legitimacy as the source of law and morality is striving to demolish society and all law. There were thus sins for which there could be no atonement, only judgment. Such offenses are called sinning "with an high hand" (Num. 33:3).

Then, in vv. 32-36, we are given an example of such a sin. In Exodus 35:2-3, death is required for such an offense because in the wilderness God provided manna for Israel; He provided miraculously for their protection and gave them food which would stay uncorrupted over the Sabbath. This was a law which required Israel to remember on each Sabbath the meaning of God's providential and miraculous care.

The man referred to in these verses had no need for a fire on the Sabbath; he had manna prepared from the previous day to feed himself and his family. The fact that he had not built a fire indicates plainly his premeditation. The law in Exodus 35:2-3 had reference to lighting a fire. He was thus playing a legal game, showing contempt for God's law while legally not breaking the letter of the law. James Moffatt renders v. 33-34 thus:

Those who caught him gathering fuel brought him before Moses and Aaron and all the community, who put him under arrest, as there was no clear law about how he was to be punished.

The arrested man would today be a good candidate for the U. S. Supreme Court. He knew the law of Exodus 35:2-3; technically, he did not break it. He publicly gathered sticks in his contempt for God's law. God ordered the execution of this man; this is the only known penalty for such Sabbath-breaking. Here its meaning is an obvious one. Immediately after the pronouncement against presumptuous and premeditated sins, this man chose to show his contempt for God and His law in an open and public way. God's penalty was death.

Not only individuals but also nations can be guilty of the sin of arrogance and presumption. This is done whenever a nation deliberately legislates into practice what God forbids in His law. Two examples of this are the legislation of abortion and homosexuality. The nations of our time have openly expressed their contempt for the Almighty. As the "enlightened" ones, they feel that contempt for God is a mark of intellectual respectability.

Well over a century ago, Joseph Parker said of this passage, "This incident has been the occasion of a good deal of jeering." Men have cited it as an example of the Bible's "extreme and intolerable severity."⁹⁵ It is automatically assumed that the man was innocent and God harsh and evil. This comes out of a rejection of God's sovereignty and His prerogative as lawgiver; such critics have their own law, and it leaves no room for God. Our problem is a false view of the universe. Citing Parker again,

We do not see the reality of the case. We think of huge sins; there are none. We think of little sins; there are none. We live in a region of fancy; we picture possibilities of sin. We play at the great game of jurisprudence, setting this against that, weighing, measuring, balancing, and telling-off things in definite quantities and relations. It is the spot that is ruin; it is the one little thing that spoils the universe. God cannot drive on his mighty chariot until something has been done with those who have committed, so-called "little sins" and have perpetrated small and almost nameless trespasses. The whole conception is wrong.⁹⁶

What is wrong is that we evaluate reality in man-centered terms, and we assume that our reason rather than God's will is the final judge. "We must not delude ourselves with the notion that there are sins which are of no consequence."⁹⁷ It was, after all, a small offense that revealed to Buchanan the evil heart of the boy who later became James I of England, as Otto Scott has pointed out.

To return once more to Parker, his comment concerning the Sabbath *and all of life* is particularly important:

Consecrated Men, consecrated Property, consecrated Space, consecrated Time, declared that God still claimed the world as his own, and that in all the provinces of human life he insisted on being recognized as Lord of all.⁹⁸

In the *third* section of this text, God requires that all the men of Israel wear "fringes" on the border of their garments. These are also called "tassels," tied by a blue cord. Such tassels were common in ancient Egypt and Babylon.⁹⁹ Outside of the Western World, people still identify their religious affiliation by something in their garb. The student rebellion of the 1960s

instinctively made itself identifiable by distinctive clothing and by long hair. They were proclaiming what they were. God's purpose in requiring this of Israel is clearly stated:

39. And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:

40. That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

41. I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God. (Numbers 15:39-41)

Pagan identifying garbs have tended to provide identification by other men. God's requirement was for self-identification; men were to be reminded constantly of their responsibility to be God's men, to exercise dominion in obedience to God.

This practice has continued in Christendom in various ways. In Eastern Orthodoxy, icons in the home have, among other purposes, been a reminder of the family's obligation under God. Clerical garb was once universally worn by all churchmen. The wearing of a cross has been a common expression of this, or an open Bible on a small lectern in a home. Many other means have been used to remind oneself of God's claim on us.

At the same time, these tassels came to be used by the scribes and the Pharisees as a means of boasting (Matt. 23:1-12). They increased the size of their tassels as a way to claim greater holiness, and our Lord ridiculed the practice (Matt. 23:5).

By wearing tassels, the believer was also always identifiable to others as well as to himself. Shortly after World War II, an Irish clergyman received from his sister in the United States a beautiful woolen sports shirt. Since he loved football, and he attended the matches in the city, he decided to wear it one cold day. On his return from the match by train, he found the town in an uproar of gossip. He had supposedly sneaked off that morning, without his clerical garb and collar, no doubt to visit a house of ill repute in the city. The presence of others at the match helped him to salvage his reputation, but he never dared wear the sports shirt again!

In typical fashion, the rabbis in time stressed the form at the expense of the meaning. Each string in the tassel had eight threads; then the number of knots and the numerical value of the words was made to total 613, the number of laws in their reckoning in the books of Moses.¹⁰⁰ The numerical value of the Hebrew letters in *tassels* is 600; the threads and knots added up to thirteen, giving 613, as they reckoned the law.¹⁰¹

God's purpose in all this is very simple: the people are to remember that He is the Lord, the sovereign. They must remember to do all His commandments, and to be holy, separated and dedicated, to God. The Lord's plain commandment is "that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes," and their departure from Him and His law is called "whoring" (v. 39). Sin is compared to adultery; we are to be God's exclusive possession, and disobedience is called adultery and whoredom throughout the Bible.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The Democratic Rebellion

(Numbers 16:1-35)

1. Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men:
2. And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown:
3. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?
4. And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face:
5. And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.
6. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company;
7. And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow: and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi.
8. And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi:
9. Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them?
10. And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also?
11. For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?
12. And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up:
13. Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?
14. Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up.
15. And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.
16. And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, tomorrow:

17. And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.

18. And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron.

19. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation.

20. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

21. Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.

22. And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?

23. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

24. Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

25. And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him.

26. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.

27. So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.

28. And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind.

29. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me.

30. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.

31. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them:

32. And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.

33. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

34. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also.

35. And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense. (Numbers 16:1-35)

We come now to what has been variously called a mutiny, a rebellion, and so on. It was, however, an assertion of equal rights by a group of leaders. The leaders were a certain Levite, Korah, a son of Rohath, Dathan, On, and Abiram, of the clan of Reuben. Their charge against

Moses, aided by 250 princes of the assembly, was, *first*, “Ye take too much upon you” (v. 3), or, in A.R.S. Kennedy’s rendering, “We have had enough of you.”¹⁰² Korah was a Kohathite, and this group camped on the south side of the sanctuary; the Reubenites also camped to the south. Thus, the revolt began and spread first among men close together and then infected others.

Second, the rebels asserted, “all the congregation are holy, every one of them” (v. 3), an assertion of religious equality. The target of this charge is specified: it is Moses. Indirectly, Korah may have had Aaron and the high priesthood in mind, since he was a Levite. It was, at any rate, an assertion of equality. Throughout history, when men demand equality, the demand is made against those above them, not below them. They do not protest that some are not as prosperous as they and then proceed to share their wealth and power with them. The demand for equality marks hypocrites who resent all who are superior, or wealthier, or who have more authority than they do. In this instance, the resentment is against Moses, whom God had clearly vindicated again and again. What God and man say are alike nothing to men who are possessed with a desire to pull others down to their level.

Third, these rebels charged that Moses did not recognize an obvious religious fact: not only are all the congregation holy, “*every one of them*,” but also “the LORD is among them” (v. 3). Again and again, God had judged these people, but now they claim that God is equally with them. This is an amazing arrogance, yet all too common even in our own day.

Fourth, given these supposedly obvious facts, “wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” (v. 3). In Numbers 11:4, we are told that a mixed multitude, or, a rabble, created the problem. In this instance, it is the leading men. They never asked, by what right are we clan leaders; it was Moses, who was above all the clan leaders, Moses, who was above all the clans, whom they resented.

The response of Moses was to prostrate himself before God and to appeal to God for vindication. The Levites associated with Korah wanted the priestly power, and the princes behind the Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, wanted the prophetic leadership and authority belonging to Moses by God’s appointment.

Moses then spoke first to the Levites, Korah and his company (v. 5). The decision would be God’s: let them appear before the sanctuary with censers and incense and see then whom God would accept. “Ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi” (v. 7).

Then Moses told them that their rebellion was primarily and essentially against God (v. 11). They were treating God’s word and His appointment of the line of Aaron as “a small thing” (v. 19). God has blessed you also, in His own particular way, and you are treating Him with contempt.

Moses also summoned Dathan and Abiram, and their Reubenite and other cohorts, but they refused to come at his bidding (v. 12). Instead, they made their own charges. *First*, Moses had by deception led them out of Egypt, “a land that floweth with milk and honey” (v. 13). Slavery in Egypt had in retrospect become prosperity. The murder of their firstborn sons a generation

earlier, the beatings by the labor levy bosses, and the abuses of their women were now nothing to them. Moses had replaced Pharaoh as the menace.

Second, Moses had brought them into the wilderness “to kill us” (v. 13). The judgment pronounced by God was now ascribed to Moses. It was all Moses’s fault that now both Egypt and Canaan were blocked to them, and that they would perish in the wilderness.

Third, none of this was their fault. With the older generation dead, Moses, they claimed, planned to make himself “a prince over us” (v. 13). All the evil was on Moses’s side, not theirs. No mention is made of God: He was not real to these men. All the miracles meant nothing to them, because no miracle means anything to the ungodly. Our Lord, in a parable, illustrates this vividly (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man in hell indicts God for not telling him what he needed to escape hell. To prove his nobility of soul, he asked God to send Lazarus from heaven to testify to his five brothers. Abraham answers him, saying,

29. They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31. And he said unto them, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead. (Luke 16:29-31)

Neither miracle nor judgment will awaken those who hate God.

Now Moses was angry. He begged God to show no respect for their offering, for “I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them” (v. 15).

Moses then told the Levites around Korah to appear at the sanctuary with their censers, “and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation” (v. 19). Moses and Aaron were commanded to separate themselves from all the congregation, so that God might destroy them all (v. 21). Moses and Aaron interceded for the people (v. 22). Then Moses ordered the people to separate themselves from the rebels. The Reubenite and other princes stood defiantly in front of their tents, with their families. The Levites went forward to offer incense. The judgment of God fell on the Levites; the earth opened up to swallow them and their families. Fire first destroyed the 250 men who offered incense. God killed them, and God buried them. Even then, the men of Israel quickly interpreted this as some kind of natural event unrelated to God and Moses.

The men of Israel were faithless, and they were also envious. Envy is basic to equalitarianism, and it is unteachable. The envious man lives in a simplistic world: to fulfill his leveling demands is seen as the remedy for all evils, when in reality it is a source of greater evils. Envy is marked by a strong impudence. The word *impudence* comes from the Latin, *im*, meaning *not*, and *pudeus*, or *shame*. Envy is a shameless thing, it is impudent, because it makes evil a virtue. It reverses moral standards and calls it good.

Moses recognized that he was the primary human target. In v. 11, he asked, “and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?” This was not especially respectful to Aaron, but it was the truth. Aaron, while still high priest, had forfeited moral authority, and they knew it. Moses was the

target. By standing in front of their tents with their families, the princes were demonstrating their defiance and contempt for Moses as he passed by.

The people here were asserting their *right* to equality. This right was declared immediately after a national act of disobedience, and there is a connection between the two. To assert a right too often means to deny a duty; it is an insistence on privilege rather than responsibility. Rights then express self-interest. Advancement through work and intelligence is replaced by coercive claims.

The rebels had accused Moses of putting out the eyes of the people, an idiom for throwing dust into their eyes. God in return destroyed them. Their claim to being a holy people was based on God's own statement, which, however, they insisted on misreading. In Exodus 19:5-6, we read,

5. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:
6. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation....

Very plainly, there was a condition to being God's holy people. They had to obey God's voice, His law, and "keep my covenant," i.e., walk in My law and rejoice in My grace. *Only then* "shall ye be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation."

They had forfeited this status by their sin. Envy always has bitter fruits. It divides men wrongly, on immoral grounds, whereas God requires a division on holy grounds.

There is another grim factor here. Korah was a close relative to Moses and Aaron, and he led the revolt. This was the most far-reaching revolt, and it came from a source close to Moses and Aaron. Centuries later, descendants of this subclan to which Korah belonged did distinguish themselves in God's service. Now they disgraced it. Civil warfare is always the ugliest and most vicious form of conflict. The American casualties in the U.S. Civil War far outnumber those of either World Wars I or II; similarly, nothing can equal church and family quarrels in their bitterness and harm. After this struggle, the life of Israel in the wilderness went only downhill. Their stand cost them dearly and brought grim and unanticipated results.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The Culture of Holiness

(*Numbers 16:36-40*)

36. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
37. Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed.
38. The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.
39. And Eleazar the priest took the brasen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar:
40. To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses.
(Numbers 16:36-40)

This is an unusual and very important text, and also a very comforting one when understood. It is very plainly declared to be for a warning to all future generations coming to the sanctuary. All the censers used by Korah and his 250 associates (leaders or princes of the tribe or clans) were to be melted down. These were made of bronze and were to be used to make a covering for the altar of burnt offering.

A man was assigned to this task, Eleazar (v. 37), one of Aaron's sons. Eleazar later succeeded Aaron as high priest (Num. 20:22-29).

Although God had rejected Korah and his associates, and had sentenced them to a swift death, incineration, the censers, having been offered to God, were holy, even though the men who offered the incense were presumptuous, evil, and sentenced to death. God will have His due of all men, even when He rejects their persons. How and when He does this is His sovereign prerogative, but He will have His due.

For this reason, Eleazar is *commanded* to collect the bronze censers. He had no option but to obey God or suffer His judgment. God's claim on what was offered to Him, even by evil men, was irreversible.

This is not all. In v. 37, Eleazar is ordered to "scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed." The fire in all the censers had to be scattered in order for the fire to go out. In antiquity and until recently, a fire was not allowed to go out casually. Before matches were invented, starting a fire was a slow process, and therefore an old fire was not usually put out. It was used to light a new one. However, even though the intentions of the men were evil and presumptuous, the fire had been dedicated to God, so, together with the censers, it could have no other use. Whatever is dedicated or given to God cannot be used in other ways. It is a part of the heresy of democracy to make what belongs to God common property. This was done by Red

China, in turning all churches into community buildings, and it is done by churches which treat God's sanctuary as a multipurpose room.

Whatever is given to God is for all time His property. We have a trace of this fact, once a Christian premise, in the laws respecting all non-profit groups, Christian or secular. On dissolution, their property and assets *must* by law go to a similar non-profit group.

One of the great neglected classics is Sir Henry Spelman's *The History and Fate of Sacrilege*. First written in 1632, it was last published in 1888. Spelman traced the history of all those families who took the church lands expropriated by Henry VIII, who assured his success by making large numbers of men his fellow profiteers from the seizure of church foundations, buildings, and lands. As compared with the noble families who refused to participate in this sacrilege, the participating families were clearly cursed in a variety of ways, including a failure of heirs. By 1632, of the 470 families out of 570 peers implicated in the sacrilege, sixty-six or sixty-seven had no heirs, and more failed subsequently. Disasters struck these sacrilegious families to a far higher degree than it did others, and all this in a relatively short span of time. Sacrilege is no light matter. The fact that our age is blind to it no more alters the grim reality of this kind of judgment than blindness of one's eyes eliminates the sun from the heavens. The premise of God's law is, "The earth is the LORD's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). We are stewards in His house, and we are given permission to use and do certain things and must abstain from doing others. Sacrilege despises God's property rights and creates its own rules. It is lawlessness, as Paul says:

21. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
22. Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
23. Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? (Rom. 2:21-23)

All lawless men and churches are guilty of sacrilege, but sacrilege is especially serious wherever what is set apart for God's use is put to other purposes.

The bronze cover for the altar, made from the censers, was a continual reminder to those who would see with seeing eyes God's penalty on sacrilege. It was also a reminder to the priests, if they would pay attention. In Bishop Hall's words, "It is a dangerous thing to usurp sacred functions. The ministry will not grace the man; the man may disgrace the ministry."¹⁰³ It is thus a serious error to see the mere fact of ordination as conferring grace; much of the church's troubles stem from this error.

With respect to the censers being made into a bronze cover for the altar, Maarsingh observed, "The pall of sin had to be transformed at the Lord's command into the positive feature of a warning sign."¹⁰⁴ In Psalm 76:10, we are told:

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

According to Kirkpatrick, this means, “All rebellion against God’s will must in the end redound to God’s glory: it serves to set His sovereignty in a clearer light (Ex. ix.16).” It shall all turn to God’s praise.¹⁰⁵ What this means is that all things work together to accomplish God’s purpose, including all the evil men do. The amazing fact that St. Paul emphasizes is that this is also true for God’s elect people:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Whether or not this is partially, fully, or not at all true in time, it is true for all eternity.

According to Exodus 29:37, “whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.” The same statement is made in Exodus 30:29 and in Leviticus 6:18 and 27. Anything withdrawn from the sphere of the profane, from outside God’s sanctuary, becomes thereby holy. This means, for example, that baptism separates us from the profane world to make us members of God’s holy congregation, and any profanation of ourselves then becomes sacrilege.

The implications of this are very important. In the modern perspective, the concept of *holiness* has been replaced by the doctrine of *rights*, and rights mean in practice interests, personal concerns. Man’s will is exalted to the position of a final moral standard, and a culture of rights leads, as John H. Hallowell pointed out, in *The Decline of Liberalism as an Ideology*, “to complete subjectivism and immorality” (89). A culture of holiness looks beyond autonomy, or self-law, to theonomy, or God’s law. In a culture of holiness, men look to God for direction; in a culture of rights, they look to men. In Haggai 2:10-14, we are told,

10. In the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying,
11. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying,
12. If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No.
13. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.
14. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean.

These words are especially relevant to our text and to our time. What man of himself communicates to things and men is sin; he has no inherent justice, morality, or merit that he or any institution can ever transmit to anyone. Holiness is not communicated by men but by God, and it is therefore to God that we must look for the basis of our culture. *Rights* create at best and at their highest an eccentric or off-center culture whose direction is downward. The culture of holiness looks to God’s grace and law, to His justice and mercy.

Jude 11 has a reference to this episode and calls it “the gainsaying of Core” (or, Korah). The word *gainsaying* is *antilogia* in the Greek, *anti* meaning against, and *logia* from a root meaning expression or word. It therefore means rebellion or disobedience. Now this hostile word of Korah had been, “Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them” (Num. 16:3). Even had this been true, in Israel or in the church, it could not be used to undermine authority, nor to insist on an equality of all men one with another, or before God.

In the culture of holiness, as against the culture of rights, the goal of society is not democracy or equality, it is justice, God’s justice, and God’s order, not man’s disorder. Again, we see the very great importance of Numbers. A slave people demanded equality; they insisted on their equal rights before God. They rebelled against the authority of Moses, a God-ordained authority, and they died in the wilderness.

Chapter Thirty

The Culture of Rights

(*Numbers 16:41-50*)

41. But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD.
42. And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared.
43. And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation.
44. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
45. Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.
46. And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun.
47. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people.
48. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.
49. Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah.
50. And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed. (*Numbers 16:41-50*)

The death of Korah and his associates taught Israel nothing. Men in revolt against God refuse to be taught. Theirs is not the culture of holiness but the culture of *rights*. They felt entitled to make claims on God and complaints against Moses and Aaron.

Their doctrine of God was also very defective. *First*, in all their complaints they have very little to say about God. Their malice is directed primarily against Moses. *Second*, then and now many people have had and do have very defective views of God. For them, God exists to ratify man's will, to see to it that man's will is done on earth and also in heaven. If God is good, He will underwrite all of man's demands, they believe. If they are told otherwise, they blame the prophet, priest, or pastor who witnesses to God's sovereign nature and purpose. Israel therefore could not believe that God killed Korah and his associates; after all, what was wrong with a demand for democracy and equality? Hence their charge against Aaron and Moses, "Ye have killed the people of the LORD" (v. 41). The rebels were for them God's people, insisting on the equal holiness of all men before God. Moses and Aaron were evil men refusing to acknowledge this fact. Somehow, by means unknown to the people, they had killed 251 important leaders.

Martin Noth used the right word in describing what the people did: this was a "revolt."¹⁰⁶ It was directed against Moses and Aaron, but it was essentially an affirmation of *rights*. Sin and crime should not be punished, for "all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is

among them” (16:3). In a culture of rights, those who believe in justice and judgment are the evil ones. Men and their rights take priority over good and evil, over all moral considerations.

Given this fact, it is not surprising that many intellectuals have held that the Marquis de Sade is the great philosopher-psychologist of the modern era. Well before Max Stirner and Friedrich Nietzsche, he proclaimed the death of God and the extinction of all ideas of good and evil. This is a necessary conclusion to any logical belief in the rights of man. It massacres the good and defends the evil.

Calvin saw this episode as indicative of the senselessness and arrogance of hypocrites in the Lord’s congregation. Commenting on v. 41, he wrote:

In two ways they betray their senselessness; first, by substituting Moses and Aaron as guilty of the murder, in place of God; and, secondly, by sanctifying these putrid corpses, as if in despite of God. They accuse Moses and Aaron of the slaughter, of which God had plainly shown Himself to be the author, as they themselves had been compelled to feel. But such is the blindness of the reprobate with respect to God’s works, that His glory rather stupefies them than excites their admiration. The foulest ingratitude was also added; for they do not consider that only a very few hours had elapsed since they had been preserved by the intercession of Moses from impending destruction. Thus, in their desire to avenge the death of a few, they call those the killers of the people of the Lord, to whom they ought to have been grateful for the safety of all. Again, what arrogance it is to count among the people of God, as if against His will, those reprobates, when He had not only cut them off from His Church, but had also exterminated them from the world, and from the human race! But thus do the wicked wax wanton against God under the very cover of His gifts, and especially they do not hesitate to mock Him with empty titles and outward signs, as the masks of their iniquity.¹⁰⁷

Age after age, the ungodly have raged against the godly because of their hatred for God and His faithful ones. The great ninth century theologian, Gottschalt Fulgentius, for his faithfulness to the Biblical doctrines of predestination and grace, was tried by a church council in Picardy in A.D. 849, in the presence of the king, Charles the Bald, and imprisoned until his death, October 30, 867, twenty-eight years later. God’s truth has commonly been unpopular in both church and state. We are in a war, although many churchmen shy away from that fact.

But to avoid the war with men is to face war with almighty God, a war no man can win. This is the great war of the ages.

We are told, in v. 42, that, “when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation.” Ronald B. Allen’s comment here is very important:

Verse 42 speaks of the men turning toward the Tent of Meeting. This may merely mean that they looked toward the tent. But it may mean that the crowd was about to take over the territory, to seize the tent as their own holding.¹⁰⁸

Such a seizure would have been a logical conclusion of the belief that all the people were equally holy. It meant a move to end the exclusive priesthood and to affirm the equality of all. The Reformation belief in the priesthood of all believers must not be confused with this false belief. The Reformation doctrine held to the equal access to God by prayer of all men, to the duty of all men to function as His priests, prophets, and kings in their particular calling, and to be the priests in their families.

It was not an equalitarian doctrine but an insistence on the *duty* of all men to be holy.

Notice that the charge against Moses and Aaron is, “Ye have killed *the people of the LORD*” (v. 41). The rebels are exalted into the status of God’s chosen ones, and Moses and Aaron are the ungodly ones! In this revolt, the moral order is turned upside down in the popular imagination. The very men responsible for God’s judgment on the nation are called His chosen ones. As C. J. Elliott observed,

It is difficult to conceive of a more striking illustration of the depravity of the human heart than is afforded by this outbreak of the same spirit of rebellion which had been so signally punished on the previous day.¹⁰⁹

This is the kind of radical and willful blindness God speaks about to Isaiah, saying,

9. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

10. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. (Isaiah 6:9-10)

This rebellion was against God, but the immediate targets were Moses and Aaron. Men strike against God’s people because they cannot strike directly against God.

As one modern rabbinic scholar has pointed out, many rabbis have used this text to exalt their own authority as successors to Moses rather than seeing it as a revolt against God’s law, authority, and judgment.¹¹⁰

God’s wrath was immediately in evidence as a plague struck down thousands. Before it was over, 14,700 were dead, not counting those who had died with Korah earlier.

We are told that the plague was stayed by Aaron at Moses’s command, by making atonement for the people. There are three aspects to this. *First*, this is the only known use of incense for atonement. Normally, incense did not atone. Here it was incense, with fire from the altar of sacrifice, so that it represented atoning sacrifice.

Second, Aaron is vindicated as priest, and as the priestly mediator between God and man, a type of the Messiah to come. Aaron's exclusive title to the high priestly office had been challenged. Aaron's *appointment by God*, not Aaron's person, is now vindicated. Those who survived lived because of Aaron's intercession. The survivors had no more merit than those who died. Only God's mercy kept them alive to die later in the wilderness.

Third, reference is made to the fact that "there is wrath gone out from the LORD" (v. 46). References to the wrath of God are not common in the modern church, but in a culture of holiness, the wrath of God is a serious consideration and a fact. In a culture of human rights, the wrath of God is replaced by the wrath of men. Rioters and demonstrators make a great show of righteous anger in the name of their rights. Similarly, as women's rights and children's rights have been asserted, we have seen similar expressions of outrage and wrath. The culture of rights is a culture of wrath, of violence, and of lawlessness. God's wrath is treated as a shameful matter, whereas man's wrath is seen as righteous anger. Our moral world is turned upside down, when the wrath of homosexuals and pro-abortionists is seen as a just defense of their rights.

The culture of rights is a culture of autonomy from God and from man, from duty and from responsibility. It is suicidal, and it manifests a love of death. As Proverbs 8:35-36 declares,

35. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the LORD.

36. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

Chapter Thirty-One

Aaron's Rod

(Numbers 17:1-13)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod.
3. And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers.
4. And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you.
5. And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.
6. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods.
7. And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.
8. And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds.
9. And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod.
10. And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not.
11. And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he.
12. And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish.
13. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying? (Numbers 17:1-13)

The key word in this text is *rod*, *mattach* in the Hebrew; it can mean a chastening rod, a scepter, or a walking stick. It is sometimes used figuratively to mean the staff of life, as bread. Here it is a literal rod, a walking stick. Such rods or walking sticks were long, sturdy, and well-worn, smoothed down for easy use. They were also used as a ready and handy weapon, and a man's head could be cracked open with them. Well into the medieval era, serfs and commoners, forbidden the use of a knight's weapon, such as a sword, could unhorse a knight on horseback with their staves, although such an act was illegal. Thus, to understand what *rods* means here, we must think of a solid staff, useful for walking over rough terrain, and also as a ready weapon.

Rods came in different styles. Men of authority, such as princes and chieftains, carried carved and ornate rods as the symbol of their rank. In such instances, the word *rod* could also mean *tribe*, or *clan*, because it represented the authority of the clan. We have a related fact in a

bishop's staff of authority; it is similar to a shepherd's staff to indicate authority over the flock. A variety of like symbols of authority are common to history, as, for example, a Celtic chief's claymore, a type of sword. It is a mistake to assume that these rods of Numbers 17 were of almond wood.

The princes of the twelve tribes were to submit their rods or staffs to Moses. In addition, a thirteenth rod, Aaron's, was also surrendered to Moses. None knew what to expect. All the rods were taken into the sanctuary to be laid "before the testimony," i.e., before the Ark. They were then told that the rod of the man whom God had chosen to represent Him would blossom, and God would put an end to the idea of a democracy before Him (v. 5).

Every man's name was to be written on his staff or rod. It is likely that all were already identifiable, but no room was allowed for doubt. All the rods are carefully labeled as well, so that no confusion was possible.

Verse 6 makes it clear that there were twelve rods, and then also Aaron's rod. In v. 3, it is called "the rod of Levi," meaning that it was the rod of authority for that tribe.

The next morning, the twelve rods were returned to the twelve princes, and in none of them was there the slightest change. Then Aaron's rod was brought forth: it had gone through all the changes of an almond tree simultaneously: it had buds, blossoms, and even fruit. This event left a vivid memory in Israel's history; rationalists since then have tried to explain away this fact and have only sounded ridiculous as a result. Hence the episode is now bypassed as a legend.

This miracle was a witness to the power of God. He can make the dead to live, whether a stick or a man. He is the ultimate power over all creation, and nothing is impossible for Him. If God can perform so great a miracle with a dry rod or staff, what can He not do with men and nations? As a result, Aaron's rod that budded was to be kept "before the testimony" as a continual reminder of God's power. Only the high priest would see it there, but it was a reminder to him, and through him to all the people, of God's great regenerating power.

As against a radical democracy, God set forth His electing choice. Aaron was not chosen for any special merit but because God chose to use him. We, too, are objects of God's electing grace, and the good that we do is His work through us. A man-ordained equality before God is plainly negated. The modern church stresses democracy; God stresses His authority. Because the rod is also a sign of power and authority, as with a royal scepter, God makes it clear that all authority is God-ordained, especially, in this case, Aaron's and Moses's. Because the entire episode was directed by God through Moses, Moses's own status with God was clearly affirmed. In the words of James Philip,

The message that comes through in all this is surely clear and plain: "Hands off My work," says God; "Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm" (Ps. 105:15).¹¹¹

Centuries later, Jeremiah was given a grim task by God, to proclaim God's judgment on an evil generation. This judgment, however, was an aspect of God's preparation for the future, for

setting aside the Hebrew states, for the coming of the Messiah, and for the church to supplant Judah. The vision of encouragement Jeremiah received included Aaron's rod (Jer. 1:7-11).

There is an interesting reference to a staff or rod *never* budding in the *Iliad*, when Achilles says to Agamemnon, in Cowper's translation,

But hearken. I shall swear a solemn oath.
By this scepter, which shall never bud,
Nor boughs bring forth, as once; which having left
Its stock on the high mountains, at what time
The woodman's axe lopt off its foliage green,
And stript its bark, shall never grow again;—
But this I swear.

In Virgil, the king, Latinus, confirms his covenant with Aeneas with a similar oath. For a rod, scepter, or staff to bud was an image of the impossible.

This episode does *not* tell us that Aaron was superior to other men, or better qualified than all others. It means that God's choice is sovereign, and we cannot in any sphere limit our obedience to only those authorities whom we believe are superior to us in every respect.

The reaction of the people to this miracle is one of self-pity (vv. 12-13). Verse 12 is rendered in Jewish versions as, "Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone." The question at the end of v. 13 is rendered, "shall we wholly perish?" The statement made is in part repetitious, but with differing emphases. *First*, "we perish." The Lord God is giving us over to death. No mention is made of Israel's arrogance or sin, no mention of the demand for a democracy of *religious* authority. The clan or tribal heads had not for a moment suggested a democratic power in the tribes; they had no desire to spread democracy below them, only above them, especially in the religious sphere. All the people were held to be equally holy; if so, why were they not equally capable of supplanting the clan leaders?

Second, they said, "we are undone, we are all undone." They were finished, in other words. But they did not say this was because of their sins, nor did they express repentance. They did *not* say, "we have sinned."

Third, in v. 13, in the last clause, they say, in J. H. Hertz's words, "shall we ever have finished dying?"¹¹² This is a complaint against God's continuing judgment. Enough is enough, they are telling God; instead of repenting, they are indicting God as merciless.

In other words, the effect of this miracle was terror, not faith.¹¹³ They had begun by insisting that all the people were holy; now they in effect questioned the holiness of God. To indict God is a part of man's original sin. To assent to the temptation to be one's own god, determining or knowing what is good and evil, right or wrong, law and morality, for oneself, is to say that God is not capable of making valid determinations for His creation. The miracle of Aaron's rod that budded kept them from another immediate rebellion, but it did not change their minds. For them,

ultimate power should reside in man's hands, not in God's. They had left Pharaoh behind them physically, but they were still more Pharaoh's people than the Lord's.

Chapter Thirty-Two

The Burden of Iniquity

(*Numbers 18:1-7*)

1. And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood.
2. And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness.
3. And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die.
4. And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you.
5. And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel.
6. And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.
7. Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. (*Numbers 18:1-7*)

The subject of these verses is “the burden of iniquity,” or, in more contemporary English, *the burden of guilt*. Once again, the book of Numbers gives us something which exposes the gap between modern thinking and God's law. Modern thinking in this area is simply ancient paganism.

First of all, in relation to what had just taken place, the arrogant attempt of some Levites and some clan princes to seize power from Moses and Aaron, God in v. 7 declares that anyone hereafter who attempts to seize priestly powers not belonging to him, must be put to death. This applies to transgressing Levites as well as others unqualified to be priests. No false modesty on the part of any priests at any time could be allowed to permit a transgression of the exclusive privileges of the priests.

Second, the priestly office meant no merit on the part of Aaron and his descendants: it was, as God says, “a service of gift” (v. 7), a calling established by God's grace. The fact that it was all of grace made faithfulness all the more urgent. The status was of God's creation, not theirs by any inherent power. Any priest who permitted unauthorized persons to perform priestly duties was also to die: this was one aspect of “the burden of iniquity” or guilt. God's electing choice, not man's will, had to be the determining factor. We are told in Hebrews 5:4-10, that even God the Son, in His incarnation, could not of Himself assume the part of our Great High Priest, except

by the calling of the Triune God: “And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Heb. 5:4).

Third, the Levites are given by God to Aaron and his descendants as a gift from God for His service (v. 6). They are to serve God under the governance of the priests, so that their relationship to God is one of subjection to the priestly line. This did not make the Levites inferior; a good case can be made for their greater importance in Old Testament history, but, with respect to the sanctuary, their part was limited and subordinate.

Fourth, there is an interesting aspect to v. 1, in the reference to the fact that the priests shall “bear the iniquity of the sanctuary.” T. E. Espin said of this Hebrew word for *bear*,

The word “bear” has, in the Old Testament, this double sense of “enduring” and “removing;” but in the person of Christ, who atoned by His own endurance, the two are in effect one.¹¹⁴

Fifth, in Numbers 17, immediately before this, Aaron’s rod had budded miraculously, but no other staff did. There may be a veiled reference to this in Ezekiel 7:10; we are there told, “the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded.” This would mean that Aaron’s line felt proud of the miracle that had taken place, instead of being humbled that God’s miraculous power and grace had chosen him.

Sixth, this points us to the key fact of this text, “the burden of iniquity” or guilt. With every gift of God there comes a corresponding duty or responsibility. We cannot ascribe our abilities and privileges to our heredity nor to anything or anyone other than the Lord. We are responsible for the way we use our responsibilities, privileges, and functions.

Now basic to paganism was and is the premise that the greater power and authority, the greater the exemption and freedom from the moral laws binding other men. I was a university student when I encountered a talented art student who insisted that his abilities exempted him from family ties, moral laws, and all requirements of civility. He lived by that premise and was dead before he reached thirty.

This opinion, however, is commonplace in many circles. When Otto Scott first published his study, *James I*, he was criticized by an historian for mentioning James’s homosexuality, on the ground that this was “a royal privilege.” Some men feel that their status as males exempts them from various civilities and duties. In one area of life after another, we are now returning to the pagan premise that supposed greatness provides an exemption from law and morality. The pagan Greek and Roman gods and goddesses routinely broke moral laws; they interfered with causality, and they substituted personal wrath for law.

This pagan premise is all around us. A flagrant example of this in recent years was President Lyndon B. Johnson; the more power he gained, the more flagrantly he indulged himself. The Roman emperors went sometimes to great extremes to show their contempt for law.

In this text, God, having given to the priests a high office, not because of their merit but because of His grace, tells them that theirs is a high burden of guilt if they are not totally faithful to Him. In other words, every gift from God, and all His blessings, have as their concomitant a burden of responsibility. Failure to meet that responsibility means a corresponding burden of guilt and judgment.

This applies to all men, and also to all nations. This is a fundamental premise of Scripture, and, in the sacrifices of Leviticus 4, the sins of the high priest are more grievous than those of a prince. Our Lord tells us, in Luke 12:48,

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

This is also basic to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Our Lord tells us there that this is basic to the kingdom of heaven. We see it in history in God's judgments. In 1 Peter 4:17, we are told:

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

We referred earlier to Ezekiel 7:10, "the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded." The context is very important. According to the whole chapter, a radical judgment was on its way. According simply to a part of this prophecy, Ezekiel 7:5-11,

5. Thus saith the Lord GOD; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come.
6. An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come.
7. The morning is come unto thee, O thou that dwellest in the land: the time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains.
8. Now will I shortly pour out my fury upon thee, and accomplish mine anger upon thee: and I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense thee for all thine abominations.
9. And mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: I will recompense thee according to thy ways and thine abominations that are in the midst of thee; and ye shall know that I am the LORD that smiteth.
10. Behold the day, behold it is come: the morning is gone forth; the rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded.
11. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness: none of them shall remain, nor of their multitude, nor of any of their's: neither shall there be wailing for them.

In the face of God's manifold blessings and mercies, their pride had budded and blossomed. They had not seen God's hand in their successes and prosperity. Now, therefore, they would see it in a radical judgment.

Ezekiel and Jeremiah both faced hostility in proclaiming God's coming judgments. They were fully aware of the burden of iniquity or guilt that the people and nation shared. Jeremiah twice tells us of what constituted popular preaching in his day:

They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. (Jeremiah 6:14; also 8:11)

James Moffatt renders it that these popular preachers were “treating the wounds of my people slightly and lightly, saying, ‘All’s well, all’s well,’ when all is not well.” They were applying cosmetics to a cancer.

We see again the relevancy of Numbers. On their way to the Promised Land, the people rejected God and chose death. Men and nations are again making the same choice.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Priests and People

(*Numbers 18:8-19*)

8. And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever.

9. This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of their's, every meat offering of their's, and every sin offering of their's, and every trespass offering of their's, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee and for thy sons.

10. In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee.

11. And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it.

12. All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee.

13. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it.

14. Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine.

15. Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem.

16. And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs.

17. But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD.

18. And the flesh of them shall be thine, as the wave breast and as the right shoulder are thine.

19. All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is *202 Numbers: Faith, Law, and History* a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee. (Numbers 18:8-19)

God often repeats Himself in the Bible, even as we do with unruly children. He knows our habit of listening closely to what is favorable to us, and then having a sudden attack of deafness if our desires and views are contradicted. We had better listen carefully to what this chapter has to say.

This same material is in substance repeated *after* this in Deuteronomy 18:1-8 and in Ezekiel 44:28-31; it appears earlier in Leviticus 6:16-18, 7:6-9, 31-33, and elsewhere.

In v. 8, God says, “I have given thee the charge” of various offerings, which can be translated, “I have given thee what is reserved (from the altar) of the contributions made to me, even all the sacred gifts.”¹¹⁵ In other words, certain things which belong only to God are reserved for the priests. These are *all the holy gifts*, a portion of things given to God.

First, these were portions of the sacrificed animals other than the whole offering and the shared offering (eaten in the shared communion meal).

Second, the oil, wine, and firstfruits were given to the priests for their use.

Third, the firstborn of animals and men (male firstborns) were to be redeemed by the believer, and a payment made.

Fourth, these things that were for priestly consumption were to be shared with his family, but not with a married daughter who was no longer in the same household.

Fifth, in v. 19, this is called “a covenant of salt,” an expression we find also in 2 Chronicles 13:5. Because salt was used to preserve foods, a “covenant of salt” means an enduring covenant.

St. Paul refers to this chapter when he cites the fact that, although it was his *right* to do so, he had never charged the church for his travel and support. In 1 Corinthians 9:13-14, he says,

13. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

14. Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

The priests could only take certain specified things. This meant that in times of faith, they were well provided for as worshippers brought in their sacrifices and firstfruits. At other times, they were no doubt near starvation. This meant that it was a temptation, in times of waning faith, for the priests to give the people the kind of religion that they wanted. They were thus open to temptation.

There is nowhere in the Bible any guarantee against sin, nor any ground for believing that a good and safe society can be established apart from God and His law-word.

There were other things that the priests could receive: a tenth of the tithe paid to Levites was to be paid to the priests (Numbers 18:26); where there was no living offended person to whom restitution could be made, it was made to the priest (Num. 5:6-8); the priests could eat the bread set before the Lord (Lev. 24:9), and they received the hide of burnt offerings (Lev. 7:8).

According to Maarsingh, “The ultimate purpose of all the offerings was to ensure the good pleasure of the Lord; to eat of them was to have a share in this great benefit.”¹¹⁶ Faithfulness to God leads to an ever widening circle of benefits.

A difference is made between the priests’ portions. *First*, in vv. 9- 10, we are told that the cereal offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering portions (Lev. 2; 4:1-6; 6:14-18; 7) were most holy and could be eaten only by the priests within the sanctuary. *Second*, the other group of offerings could be eaten by any clean member of the priest’s immediate family (vv. 11, 19).

There is an important aspect to these rules. The priests were required to be faithful to God. At every point, they, like the Levites, had a carefully circumscribed part in God’s realm. We can say that everyone has such a place, strictly under God’s government and law. At the same time, the priests, and also the Levites, were dependent on the people for their living. It was thus very easy for them to be unduly swayed by the people. The greater the responsibilities God gives us, the greater our exposure to temptations, attacks, and liabilities. People prefer to live their lives without any reminder of their duties to God and His servants. In God’s providence, maximum responsibilities and privileges mean maximum exposure and hostilities. In the modern age, the age of the state, the goal has been to make responsibility faceless by means of bureaucracies, committees, and group decisions. Not surprisingly, we are thereby especially vulnerable to corruption on a massive scale.

This situation whereby God’s servants are required to be strictly faithful to Him while materially dependent on the people is of God’s devising. It requires a strong and courageous clerisy, one capable of withstanding the unstable voice of the people.

The premise of the gifts brought to the sanctuary is that “all increase of every kind belongs to God, and this must be acknowledged by the presentation at the shrine of the first of the first fruits and the first that is born. These are not ‘given’ but ‘presented,’ since they are God’s already.”¹¹⁷ Not only the gift but also the giver belongs to God, and the presentation of the firstfruits and the gifts requires the surrender of ourselves to the triune God.

The plain meaning of this chapter militates against the notion that the true service of God is easy. We are required to be dependent upon God while materially dependent upon the people. This means that God’s clerisy must seek faithfulness rather than material success. It means that courage is required. The modern state hides its evils in a vast bureaucracy and endless rules and regulations which make for anonymity. The anonymity of cowardice now surrounds us, and all too many men are silent. We do not advance in history by means of any natural force or pendulum, but only by faith and moral courage. This is the great need of our time.

With the Enlightenment, in Europe, the relationship between people and church, already long in danger, was damaged by the rise of the modern state and established churches. In Russia, priests were not allowed to leave their vocation, and their sons had to succeed them; beautiful churches were built, but the clergy was impoverished. Only towards the latter times of the old regime did this change. In Catholic countries, the state so controlled the church that the monarch was the true pontiff, and the Magnificat was in many areas banned as “subversive.” In Lutheran Germany, the controlled clergy married only with permission, and then often the cast-off

mistresses of the local prince. In England, plural holdings stripped many churches of proper pastoral care. The state has a poor record in many areas of activity, and its record in controlling churches has not been good. The state has been a poor substitute for God.

Chapter Thirty-Four

The Inheritance of the Levites

(*Numbers 18:20-24*)

20. And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.

21. And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.

22. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die.

23. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.

24. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. (*Numbers 18:20-24*)

The subject of *inheritance* has a curious history. In much of history, inheritance has been a central fact in society. Being an heir has been all-important; it has often had too heavy a social importance and has been too heavily weighted by blood factors rather than faith factors.

In the twentieth century, our view of inheritance has been warped by several factors. *First*, there is a decline of faith, and therefore of sound premises in naming an heir. In Scripture, faith is the determining factor. While the heir was normally male, an ungodly, lazy, or incompetent male could be passed over. Caleb made his daughter his heir and added a prize for her successful suitor (Joshua 15:13-19). The line of descent was the line of strong faith and responsibility.

Second, the state has now made itself the primary heir, and it takes its portion before anyone else can. The reason for this is the return of paganism, and a retreat to the most savage form of paganism, the desire to destroy wealth, and this urge is based on envy. In ancient paganism, when a man died, his wealth often had to die with him. This could include his wife or wives, as in the Hindu suttee, or, elsewhere, the living entombment of wives and slaves. Very commonly, the material possessions of the dead man were buried with him; his property was destroyed, and his hut either pulled down or left to decay. Many brutal customs have accompanied death. Envy has often accomplished in funeral rites what it could not in the life of man. At times, debts are inherited when other things are destroyed.

Third, we are now accustomed to thinking of inheritance in purely material terms, whereas historically inheritance has also meant a faith, a name, a character, and much more.

Fourth, modern thinking on the subject is pagan; many seem to believe that an inheritance is too material a concern, and they push it out of their minds as something impure.

The Bible, however, again and again deals with heirship. Here it is the priestly and the Levitical inheritance which is the subject of legislation.

On entering the Promised Land, Israel was to divide the land, *first*, in terms of the twelve tribes or clans, and then in terms of the families in the clans. *Second*, all rural properties were to remain in the possession of an assigned family, generation after generation. Such lands could be leased but not sold. The rural population was to provide a stable element in the nation. The urban properties could be sold.

In this text, the priests and the Levites were told that they would receive no land for their inheritance. The priests would be attached to the sanctuary, and the Levites, as the instructors of Israel (Deut. 33:10), would be scattered throughout the land, in the villages and the cities.

For both priests and Levites, God was to be their inheritance: "I am thy part and thine inheritance" (v. 20, 23). This fact is repeatedly stressed in Deuteronomy by Moses, shortly before Israel conquered Canaan, as, for example:

Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; the LORD is his inheritance, according as the LORD thy God promised him. (Deut. 10:9)

And ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you. (Deut. 12:12)

1. The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance.
2. Therefore shall they have no inheritance among their brethren: the LORD is their inheritance, as he hath said unto them. (Deut. 18:1-2)

What this means is that, while the priests and the Levites served God, their sustenance came from the people. If the people were faithful with their tithes and offerings, the priests and Levites flourished greatly; at other times, they were poor or starving.

The two groups, priests and Levites, were together the clergy and the clerisy, the source of religious leadership and scholarship. If they were not supported, the nation would decay. God in this way tells the people that their future under Him depends on how they treat the clergy and the clerisy.

In v. 22, *the people* are warned against all unlawful entrance into the sanctuary, against any presumptuous assumption of duties not belonging to them, "lest they bear their sin, and die." There is a division of labor and of responsibility in God's sight.

The tithe was to be given to Levitical work (v. 24), and the Levites were to give a tithe of the tithe to the priests. Consider the implications of this. There were in Israel, apart from the Levites, 600,000 men; the Levites numbered 22,000, of which we can perhaps say that 12,000 were adult men. “This would make the provision for the Levites as much as for any five men of the tribes.”¹¹⁸ This, of course, assumes faithful tithing. Translated into our times, this would mean that funds sufficient for worship, education, scholarship, schools, universities, and more would be available. We have always what we pay for as a people.

It should be remembered that the priests also received firstfruits and other gifts: portions of meal offerings, sin offerings, trespass offerings, oil, wine, grain, fruits, and more. This took the place of their inheritance. God declares Himself to be their inheritance (vv. 20, 23). Maarsingh commented:

The Lord himself was to be the inheritance and share of the priests (v. 20). He was the basis of their existence. They could count on him to take care of them.¹¹⁹

God gives us a very practical test of a people’s caliber. If His work is not well supported, then people cannot expect God’s blessings. They have shown their contempt for their great Landlord.

The priests and Levites could own homes in the villages and cities where they served, but this was by purchase, not by inheritance at the time of the conquest.

The priest and the Levite, God’s clergy and clerisy, can be called God’s *lawyers*. We do know from the New Testament that this was the title for some experts in God’s law. God’s clergy and clerisy, as His lawyers, are called to present the case for God against a Godless generation. They are required to be faithful in their indictment of an apostate people and culture. Theirs is not a calling to sweetness and light but to the indictment of self-satisfied and willfully ignorant peoples. And, in this and related texts, God says in effect that if His faithful clergy and clerisy are not supported, the people will pay a greater price than money.

Dummelow’s comment on these verses is excellent:

Those who are separated to the service of God are taught to depend on Him. He sends no one into warfare at his own charges. See I Cor. 9:7-14.¹²⁰

It is an error common to our time to see God’s clergy and clerisy as a soothing luxury rather than as God’s army. The world is a battleground of faith and ideas.

It is of interest that the poet George Herbert (1593-1633) wrote of the tithe,

Restore to God His due in tithe and time;
A tithe purloin’d cankers the whole estate.

Thomas Scott, some generations back, stated it clearly when he noted that God placed the priests and Levites “in an inseparable connexion with the maintenance of the worship of God.”¹²¹ We are today paying a price for the neglect of God’s work.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The Levitical Tithe

(*Numbers 18:25-32*)

25. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
26. Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe.
27. And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshingfloor, and as the fulness of the winepress.
28. Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the LORD of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the LORD's heave offering to Aaron the priest.
29. Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the LORD, of all the best thereof, even the hallowed part thereof out of it.
30. Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted unto the Levites as the increase of the threshingfloor, and as the increase of the winepress.
31. And ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households: for it is your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation.
32. And ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it: neither shall ye pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest ye die.
- (Numbers 18:25-32)

The priests and the Levites had a common purpose, the service of the Lord. The priests were primarily centered on sacrifice and worship, whereas the Levites had instruction as their basic function (Deut. 33:10). While in the wilderness, the care of the sanctuary predominated for the Levites. Once they were in Canaan, only a small minority were needed for sanctuary service; the rest had broader duties, basically related to instruction.

In the church today, the division is somewhat less clear but is still there. The work of the clergy centers on worship, but, basic to worship now is preaching, a Levitical service. The clergy thus is not only the heirs of the priests but also of the Levites.

The modern Levites are Christian scholars. It is important to note how early thinkers and teachers, writers and philosophers, were basic to the life of the early church. The surviving literature of the church fathers tells us how important scholarship was to the early church. The pagan scholars were not connected with the various temples to the pagan gods. They were tutors to the wealthy and had only contempt for the common man. The ideas represented by Plato's *Republic*, the manipulation and total control of most people by philosopher-kings, were common to pagan thinkers. Scholarship was an adjunct to aristocracy, and was *not* a religious function.

Thus the support of scholarship by Christians was a remarkable development in the world's history. It is worth noting that the Reformation was the work of Christian scholars.

In this text, we are told, *first*, that the tithe was to be paid normally, in whatever form it was given, to the Levites. These gifts were holy and belonged to God for the work of His Kingdom. To misuse the tithe was to “pollute the holy things of the children of Israel,” and it would bring God’s judgment of death (v. 32). *Second*, the Levites were in turn to tithe the people’s tithe to the priests or sanctuary, for the purpose of furthering worship. If what the Levites received was in the form of ranch and farm products, the best of the tenth had to go for worship, with nine tenths retained for Levitical purposes.

When Jesus and Paul *required* the support of the servants of God, they had reference to this law (Matt. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 9:3-10, 16:2).

The observations of James Philip on this text are excellent. *First*, in God’s plan everything depends on this fact of tithing. It provides the funding for a variety of activities, worship, health, education, and welfare, and also scholarship. The tithe is God’s tax, the rent which is His due, but no man or institution is empowered to collect it. *Thus, a people get the kind of society they pay for in their tithing.* “It is plain to see that everything in the Israelite economy really depended on the principle of tithing being adopted and strictly adhered to. Only thus would the system work.” *The alternative to a tithing society is a tyrant state and its oppressive taxation.*

Second, “the spiritual impoverishment” of our time is due to the failure to tithe. Men seem to prefer the Internal Revenue Service and its power-state to tithing and a free society.

Third, in Philip’s telling words,

The significance of the tithe is that it is similar in principle to the institution of the Sabbath day of rest. Israel was to keep the Sabbath day holy and devote it entirely to God as a symbol that all days belonged to Him. In the same way the tithe is the symbol that all we have is the Lord’s; to practice tithing is therefore a standing witness of our recognition that this is so.¹²²

Both the tithe and the Sabbath tell us to rest in the Lord and in confidence that His government alone gives us peace and prosperity.

Then, *fourth*, the subject of tithing is referred to in Deuteronomy 12:6, 11 and 26:12, and Deuteronomy was used in the instruction of children. The tithe is important to shaping the future, and therefore children need to be taught its *necessity*.

We can add, *fifth*, that *a non-tithing culture is a dying one, because it does not provide for its future under God.* Christendom has been unique in world history, in that Christian scholarship has again and again revived culture by providing a framework for the future. When we look at the modern academic community *at its best*, we see men who are able critics, analysts, and historians, but their orientation is to the past and to the present. They are *more* than incompetent in their views of the future.

No other religion or culture has ever had any provision resembling this. The magi or wise men of Babylon were state-trained and state-controlled experts in various fields. The purpose of their work was to serve the state.

The quick rise of scholarship in the early church has not received sufficient attention. Paul says of Christ's purpose for His people,

11. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
12. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-12)

The word *prophet* means one who speaks for God, one who enlightens us to see things in God's perspective. A teacher, *didaskalos*, is an instructor, master, doctor, or teacher. The early church thus had its doctors or teachers who were philosophers, theologians, historians, and so on. These were men supported by the believers.

In ancient China, and until recently, various scholars, Confucians especially, were state officials, and all scholarship was state oriented and state governed. This has been the pattern wherever in any culture we find scholars. The exception has been ancient Israel and, since Christ's day in particular, Christendom.

The Levites were not allowed to neglect worship. They had to tithe and thereby witness to the priority of the worship of God; the top tenth of the tithe to them had to go for worship. But nine tenths remained with the Levites in order to further the dominion mandate of the faith. Whether in the area of knowledge, agriculture, science, and in all things else, we are required to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:26-28).

Without the tithe, without the support of Christian scholarship, we get at best a static society, and static societies are very prone to decay and collapse.

The purpose of Christian scholarship should be to clarify our vision of the past and present, to make clear God's requirements of us, to further our knowledge in every sphere, to give freedom for the exercise of the arts and sciences under God, and much, much more.

Without the tithe and the provision for the Christian teacher and scholar, a moral paralysis overtakes the church and society. This century has seen the moral paralysis of men and nations. The crisis will not go away automatically; no historical pendulum swings men and nations back into health when they are *willfully* committing suicide. The crisis deepens daily, and the popular solutions are more and more ridiculous and inane. *We have bought disaster*; we will have nothing unless we turn to God's law and way.

Chapter Thirty-Six
The Meaning of the Red Heifer
(*Numbers 19:1-22*)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,
2. This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke:
3. And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face:
4. And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times:
5. And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn:
6. And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer.
7. Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even.
8. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even.
9. And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin.
10. And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever.
11. He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days.
12. He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean.
13. Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him.
14. This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days.
15. And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean.
16. And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.
17. And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel:
18. And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave:

19. And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even.

20. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.

21. And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even.

22. And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even. (Numbers 19:1-22)

This chapter is a favorite with some commentators who find it of great interest because they see it as a relic of primitivism incorporated into the Bible. All kinds of strange theories are advanced to “explain” and exploit this rite, and it has been the subject of encyclopedia articles. While the term “red heifer” is used, in modern terms it is better called a red or reddish brown cow; our use of “heifer” means an unbred cow; in Scripture, it means a younger cow. It had to be without blemish and never yoked (v. 2). The red heifer was burned outside the camp (v. 3, 5). The ashes of the heifer were carefully kept and then used, mixed with water, to purify those who had been in contact with the dead (vv. 11ff). When the red cow had been sacrificed and was burning, cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet (perhaps wool) were cast into the fire.

This took place outside the camp, which was holy because God’s sanctuary was in the center. God being holy and the creator of life, death could not be associated with His presence. Death was and is the penalty for sin, so that even the death of a godly man is a reminder of the fact of a fallen creation and fallen man.

The ashes of the red heifer were mixed with spring water (v. 17), called “running water” in the Authorized Version. This was dipped into and sprinkled over those needing purification on the third and seventh day after defilement (vv. 17-19). Touching the dead, or a bone, or being under the same roof as the dead, required this rite. No man was permitted to regard death as a normal or natural fact; sin and death are deformations of God’s creation, and this rite’s purpose was to remind one and all of this fact. Life is normal, death abnormal, in God’s sight and purpose.

For Lord Keynes, the key fact of life was that, in the long run, we are all dead, both as individuals, civil governments, and states. His economic theory rested on this fact. As against this, the red heifer rite is a reminder that death is a perversion of God’s creation which shall finally be destroyed. Paul tells us, “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26).

The reddish brown color of the heifer has from ancient times to the present suggested or typified blood or death. It has thus been common in the church to see the red heifer as typifying Christ’s atonement. The apocryphal Epistle of Barnabas gives much attention to this rite, and in Hebrews 9:13-14 we are told:

13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh:

14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

“Dead works” are contrasted to living works, and the living works are a result of Christ’s atonement, far more efficacious than the ashes of a red heifer.¹²³

In v. 17, the ashes of the burnt heifer are described as being for “purification for sin.” This can be rendered as “for un-sin-ment.”¹²⁴ We dare not regard sin and evil as normal in God’s creation. The goal of redemptive history is the “un-sin-ment” of all things. The rite ended when the person was bathed and put on freshly washed clothing.

Any man rejecting this ritual was excommunicated (v. 13) and regarded as thenceforth unclean, comparable to a leper. *God takes very seriously His requirement that we reject the normality of sin and evil.* This rule would render most modern churchmen excommunicates because they expect the world to go from bad to worse. Instead of being God’s warriors for the “unsinment” of all things, they have too often become believers in the triumph of sin. Their faith then becomes a form of escapism, of leaving this world instead of “unsinming” it.

This was a religious rite but not an act of worship. It was an affirmation of faith in God’s purpose and the world’s future under God, its “unsinment.” The church today is very much in need of some form, rite, or act whereby the defeat of sin, evil, and death is celebrated, and the saving power of God, and eternal life in Him, are celebrated. Aspects of this celebration remain in some traditional funeral services, calling the attention of all, at the time of entombment, to the inevitable triumph of Christ, justice, and life.

The curious fact is that scholars have seen no relationship between this chapter and Numbers 18; it is seen as alien and out of place. The relationship, however, is an essential one. In Numbers 18, God requires the support of His clergy and clerisy, of worship, education, and scholarship. Without this, there can be no advance. Now we are told what must characterize God’s faithful people, especially pastors and scholars. They cannot be oriented to failure or to defeat. They must be radically dedicated to life under God and His law. Men render themselves excommunicates and outlaws before God by denying His inevitable victory. This does not mean the affirmation of our nation’s victory, or our sanctuary’s inviolability, but God’s total victory over all His enemies. God’s pastors and scholars have a duty to proclaim a victorious God and Christ, or else pay the price of faithlessness.

The water of cleansing is called in the Hebrew the “water of impurity,” and the word *impurity* is *nidda*, which refers to the woman’s menstrual discharge. The meaning thus is that the water is for the *removal* of impurity. In Noordtzij’s words, “Everything here speaks of the restoration of life.”¹²⁵ We must not forget that the world of antiquity, and especially Israel, had a sufficient memory of Eden to regard death as abnormal and unclean. We now see it as normal because of the triumph of Darwinism. Riggins said of this chapter, “What is clear is that the symbols are designed to combat death.”¹²⁶ *To combat death!* This sets forth the calling of God’s people, and

especially pastors and scholars. We fight more than men and ideas: we are at war against sin, evil, and death.

Central to that warfare is the death of Christ, whose death destroys death. Our charter of freedom is thus the atonement and the resurrection, whereby we are cleansed from the pollution of sin, which is death, and are made a new creation in Christ.

It is a sad fact that rabbis and Christian commentators have not seen this rite as important. The late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire wrote, "This ordinance is the most mysterious rite in Scripture, the strange features of which are duly enumerated by the Rabbis."¹²⁷

There is, perhaps, a reference to this rite in David's psalm of repentance. In Psalm 51:7, David prays, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Hyssop ash was a part of the red heifer formula.

This chapter tells us that sin must be abolished to destroy death. In the words of R. Winterbotham,

We have in this chapter, spiritually, death, and the remedy for death. Death is treated of not as the mere physical change which is the end of life, nor as the social and domestic loss which breaks so many hearts and causes so many tears to flow, but as the inseparable companion and, as it were, *alter ego* of sin, whose dark shadow does not merely blight, but pollutes, which shuts out not so much the light of life as the light of God.¹²⁸

There is an unusual phrase in v. 2, "This is the ordinance of the law." This is comparable to saying, "This is the law of the law." Strong attention is thereby called to what follows. Again we see its relationship to Numbers 18, tithing, and the work of the clergy and clerisy. The Levitical tithe had as its purpose to make us future oriented. Numbers 19 tells us that we must be oriented to life and victory, because death is abnormal. True Christian scholarship must therefore be life affirming because it is Christian.

There is a reference to this ritual in Numbers 31:19-24.

The Bible repeatedly speaks of man's frailty. Abraham, in speaking *to God*, says, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the LORD, which am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). Ethan the Ezrahite, in Psalm 89:48, observes,

What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?...

David contrasts our frailty with God's mercy:

13. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.
14. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.
15. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

16. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

17. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

18. To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them. (Psalm 103:13-18)

These all describe the consequences of the fall. As Oehler observed, "this does not mean that death originally belonged to man's nature."¹²⁹ Man was created to live and serve God; this is again His calling in Christ, to work for Christ's triumph and the "unsinment" of the world and its peoples.

Douglas Murray has called my attention to the prevalence of "death education" in statist schools. Samuel L. Blumenfeld has written much about this also. This is a logical development of the teachings of Darwinism and evolution. The source and end of all things is seen as universal death and nothingness. What is ultimate is also that which is alone good, hence death education and a growing suicide rate among public school youth.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

The Waters of Meribah

(*Numbers 20:1-13*)

1. Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.
2. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.
3. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!
4. And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?
5. And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.
6. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them.
7. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
8. Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.
9. And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.
10. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?
11. And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.
12. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.
13. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them. (*Numbers 20:1-13*)

According to Psalm 81:7, God tells Israel, “Thou calledst me in trouble and I delivered thee; I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah.” Three things are referred to here. *First*, Israel in Egypt cried out to God in its troubles. *Second*, in “the secret place of thunder,” Mt. Sinai, God answered and instructed Israel by His law. *Third*, He tested them at the waters of Meribah.

The important question for us is thus: we know that Israel failed the test, but how did Aaron and Moses fail?

Before coming to this, let us make mention of Miriam's death. A truly great woman, she had failed her testing by becoming jealous of Moses's second wife. By her moral failure, she had receded into the background, and her death sadly ended a remarkable career.

Here now, her brothers, Aaron and Moses, were also to be tested and were also to fail. *First* of all, there was no lack of provocation; sooner or later, we can all be provoking enough to move others to anger, but this is no justification for ungodly reactions. Another person's sin gives us no excuse for sinning, even if it be no more than an angry response. A temper tantrum cures no evil. In this instance, Israel returned to its old refrain. You, Moses, have brought us here to die. Life in Egypt was better. There is no water here for us and our livestock. We must not take this complaint too literally. There was apparently not enough water to supply two million people, but there was most likely some water, and, above all, the same wonderworking God. They seemed to believe that things happened, not that God did them.

Second, in no small grief, Aaron and Moses went to the sanctuary, prostrated themselves there, "and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them" (v. 6). God had already sentenced all the older generation to die in the wilderness. Further evidence of their ingratitude and unbelief was unnecessary. The people's whining was clearly repulsive. They complained because the Kadesh area had no sown or planted fields: they wanted ready-made blessings in spite of their apostasy.

Third, Moses was instructed to take his staff of leadership from the sanctuary, a religious scepter in effect, to summon the people to a great rock and there "speak ye unto the rock" (v. 8), and the rock would provide an abundance of water for all the people and their livestock.

Fourth, instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck it twice angrily. Moreover, he called the people "rebels." This was not what God had ordered him to do. However valid his description of them, God had already judged them, and it was not within Moses's jurisdiction or instructions to do more than speak to the rock. Moses had also said, "Must *we* fetch you water out of this rock?" (v. 10); Moses was assuming God's prerogative and power.

More than a century ago, R.D.B. Rawnsley very ably set forth Moses's offense:

...Moses had failed in his duty towards God, and that in three particulars. (1) He had failed in strict obedience. God had bidden him speak to the rock, and he had smitten it, smitten it twice. (2) He had shown temper, used hard language. "Hear now, ye rebels." (3) He had taken to himself the credit of supplying the Israelites with water. "Must *we* fetch water for you out of the rock?"

I. The first lesson to be learned from Moses at Meribah is the danger of departing, in the least jot or tittle, from any law of God.

II. The second is the immense importance attached to temperate speech, the necessity of keeping a check on temper and not letting ourselves be moved to hot and angry words. The want of self-control was very heavily visited upon Moses and upon "Aaron, the saint of the Lord." Because of it they were shut out of Canaan.

III. The scene at the rock of Meribah is further useful as carrying our thoughts upwards to Him who is the source of all our hopes, the nourishment of our soul, the very life of our religion, the Lord Jesus Christ. The rock in the desert was but a type and a shadow; the reality it typified is represented in Jesus Christ. All other waters after a while must fail; the water that Christ can give “shall be in us as a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life.”¹³⁰

By way of excuse, it can be said that Moses and Aaron were worn out by the rebelliousness and moral blindness of the people; they were exhausted and angry. This explains but it does not excuse sin.

We must look again at this text in terms of its place immediately after Numbers 18. In that chapter, tithing, and the required support of God’s clergy and scholars, is strongly stated. Now we have an incident as a warning to all such leaders, and, in fact, to anyone in a place of authority. The blindness and indifference of people to their own welfare, let alone their religious duties, is sometimes startling. It can be both painful and aggravating to see.

More than a few people have lost all patience with the present and all hope for the future. In 1931-1932, a trilogy was written in Germany, *The Sleepwalkers*, by Herman Broch. The author himself was “bleeding to death” intellectually. Commenting on the “disintegration of values,” he wrote:

Can this age be said still to have reality? Does it possess any real value in which the meaning of its existence is preserved? Is there a reality for the non-meaning of a non-existence? In what haven has reality found its refuge? In science, in law, in duty or in the uncertainty of an ever-questioning logic whose point of plausibility has vanished into the infinite? Hegel called history “the path to the liberation of spiritual substance,” the path leading to the self-liberation of the spirit, and it has become the path leading to the self-destruction of all values.¹³¹

The conclusion of the disintegration of values, said Broch, is the human individual: he then disintegrates. “We are ourselves split and riven... in our souls,” and we hunger for a leader to give us meaning and motivation. He saw without faith a need for “the mad and dreamless Antichrist. First the world must become quite empty, must be emptied of everything in it as by a vacuum cleaner-nothingness.”¹³²

This kind of despair is very easily come by, whether we are like Moses among the ancient Hebrews, or facing the world of our time. We have a responsibility in Christ to walk by faith, not by sight. To walk by sight will leave us in a despairing state, whether in a rage or a sense of hopelessness.

Paul, in writing to a church marked by very serious problems, gave God’s counsel:

7. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6:7-9)

What Paul tells us is that God's meter is always ticking; nothing escapes His knowledge or justice. Therefore, the duties are ours, but the results are God's, in His hand and timing. Knowing this, we are not to be weary in well doing.

Moses and Aaron had become weary in well doing. They wanted results in their time, not God's time, and they paid a price for this. We cannot dictate God's timing or control His hand. The temptation is there, to push God into acting as we would have Him do. As His servants, we grow weary over the toll and prevalence of sin. God's command was simple: "Speak to the rock." This too often seems to be our task, to speak to rocks and sand, to empty, unhearing minds. Such judgments, however, are not allowed us.

There is a startling conclusion in v. 13: "This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them." God vindicated Himself as holy. In Exodus 17:1-7, Moses had been commanded to strike a rock, here to speak to it. The word was to suffice. God's grace and special favor is no ground for presumption on anyone's part. God meted out justice without respect of persons. The greater our responsibility, the greater our culpability. This is the meaning of the waters of Meribah.

One more fact: we must never take analogies in the Bible in a wooden and unchanging manner, as did C. I. Scofield. Our Lord, for example, is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5); 1 Peter 5:8 calls our "adversary, the devil...a roaring lion." Here, in Numbers 20:1-13, the rock represents Christ, the water of life. At the same time, it represents mankind in its hardness of heart. It is as unlikely for water to gush out of a dry rock in a desert as it is for unregenerate men to hear and believe. The command, however, is, "Speak to the rock." It may seem an absurdity to do so. Isaiah was *commanded* to speak to people who would hear, but understand not, and see, but perceive not (Isa. 6:9). Our task is not as difficult, but, in any case, the command is clear: "Speak to the rock." God's word shall not return unto Him void, "but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). Therefore, go, "Speak to the rock." Discourage-ment is wrong. We *must* speak to the rock, and, if they will not hear, "shake off the dust of your feet" and move on (Matt. 10:14).

Chapter Thirty-Eight
Edom's Hostility, Aaron's Death
(Numbers 20:14-29)

14. And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us:
15. How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers:
16. And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border:
17. Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders.
18. And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.
19. And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing any thing else, go through on my feet.
20. And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand.
21. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him.
22. And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor.
23. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying,
24. Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah.
25. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor:
26. And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there.
27. And Moses did as the LORD commanded: and they went up into mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation.
28. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount.
29. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel. (Numbers 20:14-29)

In these verses, we see Moses attempting to gain permission to pass through the Kingdom of Edom. He wanted to pass from the plains south of the Dead Sea to the plains of the Jordan across from Jericho. It was from this point that entry was later to be made into Canaan. Moses promised

a peaceful passage. Israel would stay on the king's highway; it would not allow any livestock to stray into city fields or vineyards. If their sheep and cattle needed water, they would pay for it; if Edom did not want to sell any water, they would hurry through without it.

Moses also reminded Edom of two facts. *First*, as both knew, they were related peoples, Edom descended from Esau, and Israel from Jacob, Esau's younger twin brother. They were thus not rightfully enemies but friends. *Second*, Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the Angel of the Lord, so they came with God's favor.

Now Edom always resented Israel's priority. Edom, although without true faith, saw itself as God's chosen people. Centuries later, Rome united Judah and Edom under an Edomite king, Herod. Edom, also called Idumea, is a word meaning *red*. The forcible union of Judea and Edom or Idumea under Herod was deeply resented by most Jews, but accepted by others. A heretical strain was introduced into the Jewish world. The faith of Edom was in fertility cults.

In the days of the Maccabeans, John Hyrcanus conquered all of Edom and required the forcible conversion of all its peoples. In the war of A.D. 66-70 between Judea and Rome, the Edomites were regarded by Titus and the Romans as an important part of the Judean military forces. Thus, Edom was merged into Judea.

Some have held that the fondness of some radical Jews, as the Bolsheviks, for the color *red* is a survival of the Edomite heritage. It is at least important to remind ourselves that, over the centuries, there have been deep internal divisions within the ranks of those called Jews.

There is another factor here. The Edomites were descended from Israel or Jacob's older brother, Esau, and they believed themselves to be the ones through whom the Messiah would come, if there was one. We have an account of king Herod's pretension. Having helped with Christ's crucifixion, he felt ready to claim the messiahship for himself. According to Acts 12:21-23,

21. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.
22. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.
23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

His very painful death is recorded also by Josephus.

The strong role that the Edomites played in the Jewish-Roman War was a part of their desire to take over Israel and become themselves the chosen people.

With this background, we can understand the response of the king of Edom. He did two things. *First*, he refused passage to Israel, and this was done as ungraciously as possible. *Second*, he sent out an army to the border to block the way.

The "king's high way" is referred to in Numbers 21:22 also, and again in Deuteronomy 2:27. According to John Sturdy, this road ran from Damascus down through what is now Jordan to the

gulf of Akaba. It is now called in Arabic the “road of the rulers.”¹³³ Centuries later, Emperor Trajan rebuilt it.

Moses and Israel chose not to fight. They chose instead to take a long route around Edom to Mount Hor. Their purpose towards Edom was peaceful.

The time had now come for Aaron to die: “Aaron shall be gathered unto his people.” He would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land for his part in the sin at Meribah. All the same, his death, like Moses’s death later, was an honorable one. The phrase, “gathered unto his people,” or “gathered unto his fathers,” is *normally* used to describe the death of a godly man in his old age. It is an important term in the Bible. *First*, its basic meaning is that a reunion takes place with one’s ancestors in God’s Kingdom. Its implication is of rest and victory. It is a term which essentially refers to life after death. *Second*, a minor meaning, not always the case, refers to burial in an ancestral burial ground. Over the centuries, and even now, many families have had a burying ground to which family members are brought.

Aaron, Moses, and Aaron’s son Eleazar went to the top of the mountain. Moses ritually stripped Aaron of his high priestly garments and put them on Eleazar (v. 28). Sometime thereafter, Aaron died and was buried there, and Moses and Eleazar returned to the camp. There was then a thirty-day period of mourning (v. 29). This custom of thirty days of mourning was common in Christendom until recently for all great personages, and flags are still flown at half-mast for thirty days.

Aaron died, but the priesthood did not die. God’s servants are office-bearers who serve under God and for His purposes. Similarly, judges are not the law, even though many confuse themselves and their words with the law. They are, like priests, God’s ministry of justice, and that ministry does not end with their death. Thus, priests, ministers, public officers, judges, and others must see themselves as no more than God’s agents; they have no independent authority, nor does their office give them any special wisdom or superiority.

The comment of Joseph Parker on this chapter is superb:

We live, then, in a scheme of Providence. Life is not atheistic. Our sufferings have an explanation; our weakness is not an accident, but the outcome of a series of processes often lying beyond the line of imagination. The lesson is that we should accept life solemnly, pass through all its processes of our own will or fancy, but should always say, — My God, thy will be done. Let no man undertake to be God for himself; let him occupy his definite position as servant, errand-bearer, worker in the vineyard, and let his spirit express itself substantially thus: Lord, at thy bidding I would go, at thy bidding I would stay; give me understanding of my time; give the noble Christly heart, and inspire me by the Holy Spirit that I may be enabled so to succeed as to ripen into a harvest of satisfaction and gladness in the coming days. No man can live in that spirit without being in heaven as to all the substance and quality of heaven’s meaning. That is what is meant by praying without ceasing—namely, living in the prayerful

spirit, always being in touch with God, ever having God's throne in view, God's law at heart, God's will the inspiration and direction of life.¹³⁴

It is worth noting that, according to Numbers 33:39, Aaron was 123 years of age when he died. At that age, he walked up a mountain to his burial site. As with Moses later, his grave was to be known to God, not to men generally. They were thus preserved to a silent dignity in death.

There is an oblique reference to Aaron, and to priests generally, in Hebrews 5:1-4:

1. For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:
2. Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.
3. And by reason thereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.
4. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

By his very weaknesses, Aaron was, we are told, a compassionate high priest. He was thus a type of Christ,

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15)

H. P. Liddon, in *The Family Churchman*, April 27, 1887, called attention to the quiet dignity of Aaron's death:

Nothing is more noticeable in the account of Aaron's death than his deliberate preparation for it. He did not let death come on him; he went to meet it. There was a twofold motive in the act of Moses in stripping Aaron of his garments. (1) It showed that the office of the high-priesthood did not depend on the life of any single man, and, (2) it reminded Aaron personally of the solemn truth of the utter solitariness of the soul in death.

The phrase of Moses, "Aaron was gathered to his people," seems to point to a world in which the bygone generations of men still live, a world of the existence of which God's ancient people were well assured, though they knew much less of it than we.¹³⁵

Some years had now passed. Numbers 33:38 tells us that Aaron's death was in the fortieth year after the Exodus, on the first day of the fifth month. The older generation was disappearing as God cleared the way for the conquest of Canaan. Not entirely so, however, because two older men provided the leadership for the conquest, Joshua and Caleb, *not* the younger generation.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

The Fiery Serpents

(Numbers 21:1-9)

1. And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners.
 2. And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.
 3. And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah.
 4. And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.
 5. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.
 6. And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died.
 7. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people.
 8. And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.
 9. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.
- (Numbers 21:1-9)

In vv. 1-3, we have a brief account of a military engagement. A Canaanite king, Arad, whose realm was in the south, moved against Israel when they approached his realm. Some prisoners were taken. Adversity often makes men prayerful, so Israel prayed and vowed to devote the cities of this realm to God, i.e., to destroy them and to give all the wealth thereof to the Lord. God answered their prayer, and Israel successfully destroyed this realm for the time being.

It is interesting that, in this predicament, the people did not call upon Moses. In desperation, they prayed directly to God. The attacks by the forces of King Arad were apparently devastating.

Their religious revival, however, was a short-term thing. They complained about the poor terrain; they were in the general area of the Dead Sea. They whined about having only manna, “this light bread,” to eat. They spoke against God, and against Moses, and they again charged that they had been brought up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness.

Because of their whining unbelief, they were going to die in the wilderness, but the fault was theirs, not God's. Men find it far easier to blame God than themselves.

Because of their rebellious whining, God punished them once again. The area was and is an area of many venomous snakes. The term *fiery* serpents has reference to the effect of their bites. Many died as a result of these snake bites, so, once again, they "got religion." They came to Moses, confessing that they had "spoken against the LORD," and they asked Moses to pray for relief.

God ordered Moses to make an image of a poisonous serpent out of brass, and to set it on a pole. Everyone bitten who looked at the image would live. This is what happened (vv. 8-9).

This image was kept in the sanctuary as a reminder of the event. However, in time, the people began to worship this image, and so king Hezekiah ordered that it be destroyed (2 Kings 18:4).

There are references to this episode in the New Testament. According to 1 Corinthians 10:9,

Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

The word *tempt* means in the Greek to test thoroughly. It tells us that the whole natural order of things was reversed. God as the Lord has every right to test us, to try us to demonstrate to us what we really are. Man has no right whatsoever to test or to prove God. To do so is to play god and to sin even as Adam did (Gen. 3:1-6). Charles Hodge said of this verse,

Men are said to tempt God when they put his patience, fidelity or power to the test. Acts 5,9. Matt. 4,7. Heb. 3,9. It was thus the Israelites tempted him in the wilderness. They tried his forbearance, they provoked him. The exhortation is that we should not thus *tempt Christ*. This supposes that Christ has authority over us, that he is our moral governor to whom we are responsible, and who has the power to punish those who incur his displeasure. In other words, the passage assumes that we stand in relation to Christ, which rational creatures can sustain to God alone. Christ, therefore, is God.¹³⁶

Godet also threw much light on this text in his commentary, writing,

The expression *to tempt God*, so often used in Scripture, signifies: to put God to the proof, to try whether He will manifest His goodness, power, and wisdom either by succouring us from a danger to which we have rashly exposed ourselves, or by extricating us from a difficulty which we have ourselves willfully created while reckoning on Him, or by pardoning a sin for which we had beforehand discounted His grace. This, according to the biblical view, is one of the greatest sins man can commit. The Jews committed it in the wilderness by their murmurs, because they sought thereby to challenge the display of Divine power in the service of their lusts. The Corinthians in their turn committed it by pushing to the utmost limits the use of their Christian liberty in regard to heathen feasts.¹³⁷

Man demands that God meet his expectations instead of himself meeting the requirements of God's law-word.

There is another very important reference to this episode in the New Testament. Our Lord says, in John 3:14-15,

14. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15. That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

The commentators who have wrestled with this text shy away from an obvious fact. Some kind of relationship is posited between Jesus Christ and poisonous snakes sent by God to judge Israel. This is not an analogy which pleases a sentimental church determined to see only a Jesus "sweet and mild" who radiates only Matthew Arnold's variety of sweetness and light. The medieval depictions of the Last Judgment, with Christ as the Great Judge, were closer to the truth.

If Jesus Christ is everlasting life and salvation for His people, then the reverse is obviously true that He is judgment and death for the ungodly.

We live in a time when capital punishment for capital offenses is seen as morally wrong, and every kind of legal action is taken to thwart the death penalty. The average prison time for those given a life sentence is six years. The hatred for all who protest this injustice is intense. The champions of the abolition of the death penalty are numerous in the church and out of it. As a result, the idea of Jesus Christ as the Great Judge who sentences reprobates to hell is very unpopular. Consequently, our Lord's very words in John 3:14-15 are evaded, and their meaning passed over.

Now it was God who sent the poisonous snakes into Israel's encampment. At every turn, they were surrounded by them, bit by them, and died by their poison. The Scripture is very clear: we are told, "And the LORD sent fiery serpents among his people" (Num. 21:6). When Moses erected the copper or brass serpent, and set it upon a pole, only those who came to it lived. To come to it meant to confess that God's judgment was altogether just and righteous. It was an admission that they deserved to die at God's hands, and that only He could save them. The fiery or poisonous snakes thus represented God's judgment, and the copper snake on a pole, God's grace.

Our Lord makes exactly this point and *identifies* Himself with the snake on the pole. He contrasts *perishing* with *eternal life*, and it is He who makes the difference, and totally so.

We do *not* come to Christ honestly if we assume that He is a ticket to heaven. We see Him first as the Great Judge whose sentence is death to all rebels, but whose grace to us is "eternal life."

Snakes have usually been symbols of evil. In a sense, this is still true here. Paul declares, in 2 Corinthians 5:21,

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin: that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

All our sins were laid on Him, the sinless one, who made atonement for our sins. His purpose in this is plainly stated: “that we might be made the righteousness (or justice) of God in him.” The purpose of the cross thus remains a very clear one: we are redeemed to represent and further God’s justice in the world.

This episode in Numbers, and the interpretation of it by our Lord, is a very clear one. It is either God or His judgment. There are no other alternatives.

There is another aspect of these verses that deserves serious attention. We are told that Hezekiah had the image of the serpent destroyed because “the children of Israel did burn incense to it” (2 Kings 18:4). The brazen serpent had been in Moses’s possession; it was obviously preserved by him and Eleazar in the sanctuary as a reminder of God’s judgment and grace. The sanctuary always had in it various carved, embroidered, or otherwise made depictions, of pomegranates, the cherubim, (later the brazen bull laver), and so on. Neither God nor Moses saw such things as violations of the commandment against graven images or pictorial depictions, because the law is clear that it is worshipping and bowing down to them that is evil and forbidden (Ex. 20:4-6). It was Zwingli who turned the church against all art, including music, so that many Protestants read Zwingli’s perversion into Scripture.

Chapter Forty
Battles
(*Numbers 21:10-35*)

10. And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Oboth.
11. And they journeyed from Oboth, and pitched at Ije-abarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising.
12. From thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared.
13. From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites.
14. Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,
15. And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab.
16. And from thence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water.
17. Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it:
18. The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah:
19. And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth:
20. And from Bamoth in the valley, that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh toward Jeshimon.
21. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying,
22. Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders.
23. And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel.
24. And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong.
25. And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof.
26. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon.
27. Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared:
28. For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of the high places of Arnon.

29. Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites.
30. We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba.
31. Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites.
32. And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there.
33. And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei.
34. And the LORD said unto Moses, Fear him not: for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon.
35. So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land. (Numbers 21:10-35)

After a generation of wandering in the wilderness, Israel now began to near the Promised Land. Not all the older generation were dead, but they soon would be. Israel finally began to express some expectation of victory, and we have three short victory songs or poems in these verses, in vv. 14-15, 17-18, and 27-30. These may be excerpts from the original songs, used to describe the areas of victory, and also an event. They suddenly found that they could be winners, and the result was exuberance. Their conquests were on the east side of the Jordan, not in the heart of Canaan.

One aspect of these verses has created more than a little curiosity, and it has led to the writing of apocryphal books claiming to be the supposedly “lost books of the Bible.” The reference in v. 14 is to the “book of the wars of the Lord.” This was apparently a log kept of Israel’s battles; it had no inspired character and disappeared. In Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18, reference is made to the “book of Jasher.” This, too, had military matters as its content. Later, according to 1 Kings 14:19, there was kept a “chronicle of the kings of Israel,” and, according to 1 Kings 14:29, a “chronicle of the kings of Judah.” However interesting these might have been to later historians, God preserved only the inspired text of Israel’s history.

In vv. 10-20, the journey from Obod to Pisgah is cited. Then, in vv. 21-30, we have the warfare with Sihon, King of the Amorites. Finally, in vv. 31-35, we have the radical defeat of Og, King of Bashan. In Psalm 135:6-13, we have a celebration of God’s providence from Egypt to the borders of Canaan:

6. Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.
7. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures.
8. Who smote the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and beast.
9. Who sent tokens and wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his servants.
10. Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings;

11. Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan:

12. And gave their land for an heritage, an heritage unto Israel his people.

13. Thy name, O LORD, endureth for ever; and thy memorial, O LORD, throughout all generations.

In the process of these events, Israel whined and complained about all of God's ways; in looking back, the Psalmist reminds the people of God's total and providential government.

In the first section, the march from Arabah to Oboth and finally to Pisgah, we have the song of the well. In James Moffatt's rendering, it is given thus:

Spring up, O well—
ah, sing to the well
that chieftains dug,
that captains delved,
wielding their wands,
wielding their staves! (Numbers 21:17-18)

According to rabbinic tradition, this song was sung on every third Sabbath. The song is a kind of prayer as well as a happy chant that the work of the leaders produced a richly abundant supply of water.

The key verse, however, is v. 16, where we are told that "the LORD spake unto Moses, gather the people together, and I will give them water." Obedience precedes blessing, and, in this instance, Israel obeyed, and hence its exuberant joy. The use of these verses on the Sabbath was a reminder of the fact that God supplied a basic and elemental need to an obedient people. This episode took place at Beer, which means *well*. Apparently this *well* was in part a spring, and the leaders used their staves and scepters to clear the ground for its flow.

The previous song, in vv. 14-15, again citing Moffatt's version, reads:

Through Waheb we wept,
through the valleys of Arnon,
o'er the slope of the valleys
that stretches where Ar lies,
that leans over Moab's edge.

Control of water has always been the control of life, and statism from antiquity has sought to control the water supplies as a way of controlling people. The existing Canaanite powers controlled the water supplies in their areas. These lines celebrate going over an area, *waheb*, meaning *watershed*, and then, at God's direction, finding an abundance of water where God directed them to dig.

There were two powerful states in Israel's way as it now moved towards the opposite shore from Jericho and Canaan. These were the Amorites under Sihon, and the Bashan under Og. Og's

people were the Rephaim, a race of giants; the only survivors of such peoples are to be found in central Africa, the Watusi, similar in size rather than racially. These two victories were shattering in their impact on Canaan. All the memories of Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egypt were revived, as Rahab later testified. In particular, the victory over Bashan was total: no Bashanites survived this bitter and intense war.

Again, Moffatt's rendering of vv. 27-30 is telling:

27. Hence the song and satire of the bards—
Come to Heshbon and rebuild it!
Repair the capitol of Sihon, if you can!

28. For the blaze began at Heshbon,
at the capitol of Sihon,
till Ar of Moab was consumed,
and Arnon's heights devoured.

29. Poor Moabites!
O forlorn folk of Kemosh!
The god has left his sons to flight,
his daughters to a prisoner's plight,

30. their children have perished
from Heshbon to Dibon;
and we ravaged till war's fire
was blown to Medeba.

This song says that Heshbon, Sihon's capital, is gone. There are none of his people left to repair it. More important, it looks ahead to victory over Moab. They had only recently gone around Moab to avoid confrontation; they knew now that it would come, and they would devastate Moab, and the song is thus a prediction of things to come as well as a celebration of a present victory.

The reference to Kemosh is to the god of the Moabites.

James Philip has superbly noted that this incident typifies the conflict between the world and God's people. It is "an irreconcilable conflict," "to the death," and it cannot be avoided. Either God's will is done, or man's. There is no other alternative. We must therefore be "at one with Him in His purposes in the world." The very gates of hell cannot hold out against God's Kingdom.

But the work of God always advances by the way of conflict whether in Old Testament times or in New, or today, and it is unrealistic for us to think otherwise, or to imagine that we will ever get by in our Christian experience without encountering opposition of one kind or another. As the apostle Paul puts it, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."¹³⁸

God's judgment on Egypt had broken its control over Canaan and adjacent areas. Now, for about forty years, various small states had arisen. These were all wealthy and prosperous, because Canaan was the trade route between Egypt and North Africa and Asia Minor. All through history, various powers have struggled to control this area. This is a very important fact. God did not lead His chosen people to a secluded and safe area but to a major highway of commerce, a place of testing, struggle, and stress. This was not to punish them but to give them the opportunity to grow, to be tested and to learn. Religiously, it was an area of fertility cults; sexually, it was an area which makes our modern "sex revolution" and Rome's depravity look somewhat better. God brought His people face to face with evil. Just as Adam in the Garden of Eden had the tempter, so God's chosen people had to confront evil in all its power. This is no less true for Christians today. We must confront evil with the power of God's word and Spirit and become "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37) in Christ. Our salvation does not free us from our problems but rather enables us to battle successfully against the sins and evils which beset us.

The idea of the Promised Land no doubt meant to many Hebrews the end of their troubles in a land resembling Eden. It is true that in that era Canaan was an area of much more water, forests, and wildlife than now. The Turkish rule did much to devastate the land in every way. Israel was taken to Canaan from Goshen in Egypt, from an oppressive slavery to a far more trying freedom. God's purpose for His ancient chosen people, and for Christians today, His present chosen ones, is testing, struggle, problems, and victory through battle in the power of God's word and Spirit. Satan in Eden to Eve, and to Christ in the wilderness, offers ostensibly an easier way.

Chapter Forty-One

Balaam's Ass

(Numbers 22:1-35)

1. And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho.
2. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites.
3. And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel.
4. And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.
5. He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me:
6. Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.
7. And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak.
8. And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam.
9. And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee?
10. And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying,
11. Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out.
12. And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.
13. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you.
14. And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us.
15. And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they.
16. And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me:
17. For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people.
18. And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more.

19. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more.

20. And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.

21. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab.

22. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him.

23. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.

24. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side.

25. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again.

26. And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

27. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

28. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?

29. And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee.

30. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.

31. Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

32. And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me:

33. And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive.

34. And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.

35. And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. (Numbers 22:1-35)

The story of Balaam was once a pulpit and pew favorite. References to it were not uncommon in public addresses and everyday speech. It is now neglected because the idea of a talking ass or donkey is much ridiculed. It is apparently too great a miracle for modern man. And yet it is our

modernists and evolutionists who believe in the truly stupendous and contradictory miracles, such as something, an entire universe, originating out of nothing, in spontaneous generation of life from non-life, and so on and on. Such beliefs require great and absurd faith. The God who created all things can make an ass speak.

Israel now faced a powerful and evil nation, Moab. Moab, under King Balak, was determined that Israel should neither pass nor be ignored. Balak, however, was fully aware of the miracles that had surrounded Israel from Egypt to its borders, and he recognized the military prowess of Israel against the realms of Sihon and Og. As a result, knowing also God's periodic displeasure with and anger against Israel, Balak decided to bring in a non-Hebraic prophet, who, like Jethro, was a surviving believer in the true God among the non- Israelites, to invoke God's curse on Israel.

Balak's belief was one common to antiquity as well as to our time, namely, that man can, by some device, prayer, or ritual, control God. Some churches have prayer chains, in itself a good idea, i.e., sharing concern, but too often people believe that if enough people pray the right way, God will give them what they want. Our Lord, in the Garden of Gethsemane, prayed, "Father if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Balak therefore sent for the prophet Balaam; he was determined to control and foil God's purposes. The theoreticians in modern science have like goals, and some call their work "simulations of God." Balak, whose name means "one who lays waste," was determined somehow to lay waste Israel. He sent to Pethor, meaning "the River," i.e., the Euphrates, some 400 miles away, to fetch Balaam.¹³⁹

Now Balaam is mentioned three times in the New Testament. Peter says of false believers that they are those

Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness. (2 Peter 2:15)

Our Lord's brother, Jude, writes:

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and run greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. (Jude 11)

Our Lord Himself, in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2:14, refers to Balaam as a type of the reprobate man:

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

This presents us with an important fact: Balaam was apparently in all ways a “true believer” until his faith was put to the test. Then his reprobate character became apparent. Balaam experienced miracles and revelations, but he still chose evil.

Balaam played a waiting game. When Balak’s men arrived, Balaam asked them to stay overnight while he sought God’s counsel (v. 8). God made it very clear to Balaam that he was to reject Balak’s wishes (vv. 9-14). As a result, Balak sent more important men to see Balaam with promises of greater honor and wealth (vv. 15-17). Balaam said that he could not go if he were given a house full of gold and silver, but, hoping for a loophole in God’s requirements, he asked the delegation to stay overnight while he again inquired of the Lord (vv. 18-19). This time, God told him to go, but not to fulfill Balak’s requirements but God’s (v. 20). Balaam started out with two servants; Balak’s men had apparently hurried ahead with the good news of Balaam’s willingness. Clearly, Balaam was going with devious intentions, not godly ones. Irving L. Jensen has pointed out that the Hebrew text makes it clear in v. 22 that God knew Balaam’s evil intentions and was angry because of it.¹⁴⁰ Balaam was not going as God’s spokesman, but for his own greedy purposes. At this point, Gordon J. Wenham’s words are very telling:

...This parallelism between Balaam and his ass suggests that the ability to declare God’s word is not necessarily a sign of Balaam’s holiness, only that God can use anyone to be his spokesman.

Throughout the Bible, prophecy and other ecstatic spiritual gifts are regarded as signs of inspiration, but not necessarily of holiness or of a right standing with God. False prophets may accurately foretell the future (Dt. 13:1-5).¹⁴¹

This is a humbling fact. If we will not speak or act for God, He can use a jackass to accomplish His will. We are not as important as we often think we are.

On the way with his two servants, and Balaam riding his donkey, the Angel of the Lord barred the way. He was at first visible only to the donkey, who saw Him, sword in hand, and turned aside. Twice this happened. On the second occasion, there was a stone wall on either side, and so Balaam’s foot was crushed somewhat against the wall. On the third occasion, the ass sat down, there being no way to turn. Balaam then in a rage beat the donkey. God then gave speech to the ass, who protested the beatings; Balaam wished he had a sword in hand to kill the ass, his anger was so great. At this point, God opened Balaam’s eyes to see the Angel of the Lord and he “fell flat on his face” (v. 31) in fear. Balaam was told, “thy way is perverse” (v. 32).

Balaam then confessed that he had sinned, and he offered to return to his home (v. 34). God, however, ordered Balaam to go on, “but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak” (v. 35). “So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.”

There is an irony in this entire episode, in that Moab, however evil, was not a Canaanite nation nor a part of the Promised Land.

Balak, in fear, anticipated a problem that existed only in his own mind. As a result, his own mind and imagination created a problem that ended in disaster. It is interesting, too, that Midian joined

with Moab in this fear, and v. 7 tells us that the first delegation to Balaam included elders of Moab and Midian both.

The second delegation included not only more important men but also greater promises, apparently on the supposition that Balaam's dignity required a more prominent delegation. Humanistic sensitivity was very much in mind, and hence diplomatic dignity was offered to Balaam by the coming of princes. All this was very flattering to Balaam, but God, by making Himself visible to a jackass before revealing Himself to Balaam, mocked the pompous dignity and pretensions of men.

It is a curious fact that Jewish scholars, such as Maimonides, and the late chief rabbi of Britain, Dr. J. H. Hertz, have not taken this episode of the talking ass as history but have seen it as a dream or vision. This makes nonsense of the incident and text.¹⁴²

In v. 24, Balaam says, "I have sinned," a good example of false confession. There is no specific reference to the true nature of this sin, nor any change of heart. Those who think mere words constitute a valid confession had better remember Balaam. His offer to return home was as hypocritical as his confession. We are then told,

35. And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak.

This is God's word to all of us. Man in his stupidity believes that he can correct or improve God's word. He believes that his contribution is an essential one. Sad to say, God's irony in this episode is lost on man, especially in our day. God does not need us: we need Him. God can bring forth wisdom from the mouth of a jackass to confound man. Man in his arrogance, age after age, dreams of surpassing God with his Towers of Babel, his new world order, but "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:4).

Chapter Forty-Two

Balaam and God's Word

(*Numbers 22:36-41*)

36. And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast.
37. And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able indeed to promote thee to honour?
38. And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.
39. And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kirjathhuzoth.
40. And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him.
41. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people. (*Numbers 22:36-41*)

King Balak went out eagerly to meet Balaam. In fact, he hurried to meet him at Ar of Moab, a border city. From there he took Balaam to Kirjath-huzoth, meaning “city of streets,” close to a point from which Israel’s vast encampment could be surveyed. Balak expressed his disapproval of Balaam’s delay in coming.

Balaam’s answer is very interesting. We will examine it carefully, because it tells us much about Balaam: “Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak” (v. 38). Balaam stated the matter clearly, that he was bound by God to speak the truth. He was, however, planning to milk the situation as much as possible for his own advantage. We see, therefore, *first* of all, that Balaam made no reference to Jehovah, to the living God. He used a word, *God, Elohim*, which could be applied to any number of false gods. He thereby avoided citing the fact that the Lord God was Lord over Israel. This was an evasive tactic. Balaam was avoiding obedience either to God or to King Balak.

Second, Balak offered sacrifices immediately. This was a practice common to kings in antiquity, and it is evidence of the fact that religion was a department of state. A Roman emperor, for example, was Pontifex Maximus, the high priest over the realm. Religious freedom was thus nonexistent. The state was man’s true church, and man’s mediator with whatever powers existed. Obedience to the state was thus an urgent “fact” of life. Christianity was therefore everywhere the most intense threat to the life of the state.

Third, for this reason, it was difficult for a pagan ruler to grasp the implications of Balaam’s statement that he could only say what God permitted him to say. Control over heaven and earth belonged to the state. The other world was a kind of shadow-land, potentially dangerous but controllable. State control over religion was seen as a necessary exercise of jurisdiction over a realm which could be threatening. In many forms of paganism, the spirits of the dead resented the supposedly better life of men on earth, and so they had to be placated.

Fourth, because of the ostensible superiority of this world, to bless or to curse required meeting this world's standards, i.e., the person cursing or blessing had to *see* the objects or persons involved. If the malediction could be in their very presence, all the better. As a result, "Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people" (v. 41). Only from a high mountain site, viewing the entire encampment of Israel, would the curse be truly effective.

Fifth, this was a high place to Baal, or Bal, or Bel, in feminine form Baalat, Beela, or Beltu. The word means master, owner, or possessor. The word applied to supernatural forces *and* to the ruler. *Baal-Malki* means "Baal my king." This usage calls attention to a very important fact. It was believed almost in all forms of paganism that a continuity existed between all kings or rulers and whatever natural and supernatural powers existed. Although at times this link could be weakened or endangered, continuity to some degree was an essential fact. Another ruler's continuity and power might be greater, and it was important to strengthen the link. This was a naturalistic faith: all things were developments of a cosmic process, and it was necessary to help that process by good communications with natural and supernatural forces.

Sixth, implicit in everything Balak said and did was the presupposition that money could buy whatever he wanted. At all times in history, the cynical proverb, "Money talks," has in some form been known. In antiquity, however, rulers with an arbitrary power of life and death over people regarded contradiction as an insulting attempt to demand more money. This may have been Balak's attitude. He certainly was displeased with Balaam for his delay in coming.

Seventh, as we shall see later, Balaam had in his heart a desire somewhat to correct God's plan and to gain an advantage for himself. This is a common failing among men. God's ways are irksome to fallen man, and he tries in various ways to set God straight. Despite his outward conformity to God, Balaam nursed a desire to correct God. He had no connection with Israel, and he had nothing to gain by their success. Balak's offer seemed to him entirely reasonable, and God's purposes were alien to Balaam. Newman wrote of this episode:

The following reflections are suggested by the history of Balaam: (1) We see how little we can depend in judging of right and wrong on the apparent excellence and high character of individuals. (2) We can sin without being aware of it, yet wrath is abroad and in our paths. (3) When we have begun an evil course, we cannot retrace our steps. (4) God gives us warnings now and then, but does not repeat them. Balaam's sin consisted in not acting on what was told him once for all.¹⁴³

Eighth, in spite of himself, Balaam set forth the right doctrine of prophecy, preaching, and all Christian activity: "...have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak" (v. 38). Man, however, wants to speak a creative word, to improve on or bring up to current or modern standards God's word. Whenever and wherever the church and churchmen depart from God's word, they drift into impotence and irrelevance. Balaam is a good representative of all too many churchmen.

Jesus Christ, God incarnate, had this to say to the tempter: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Men, however, are not content with that “every word”: they want to add their word to it, or to correct God’s word with their ostensible wisdom.

Cornelius Van Til, in describing Paul’s reception at Athens, described the fallacy which undergirded the Greek mind and also the modern mind:

By the time Paul came to Athens, Greek speculation had virtually run its course. It consisted now of a balanced combination of abstract rationalism and abstract irrationalism. The Parmenidean assumption, that only that can exist which can be logically penetrated by the intellect of man, was still the accepted principle. But then Aristotle worked out the principles of formal logic. He insisted that first principles of reasoning, such as the law of contradiction, cannot themselves be proved. He warned his followers against the definition-mongers. We must then have the Parmenidean principle of *logical penetration* as the measure of what is knowable to man, but we must have this principle as correlative to an equally ultimate principle of *pure matter*. Pure contingency must have a place. Unless contingency is given a place, the laws of logic will be entirely separate from the facts of space and time. So runs the argument of Aristotle.¹⁴⁴

Hegel gives us the logical conclusion of this: the rational is the real, so that existentialism followed logically. The rational man’s thinking replaces God’s creation as the reality.

As Van Til said further:

Man’s autonomy is assumed to be the sole presupposition in terms of which any revelation that might come from any god would be intelligible. Yet it is this very supposition of the autonomous self-understanding of man that acts as the primary representation of what Paul speaks of when he says that “knowing God” men have not kept him in remembrance (Rom. 1:21). Calvin clearly urges Paul’s view upon us. Man has no pre-understanding of himself apart from and prior to his confrontation with the revelation of God in Christ. It is from this Calvinistic point of view that we shall finally need to evaluate the new hermeneutic as well as every other form of modern theology, philosophy and science.¹⁴⁵

The “Christian” who seeks to drop any part of God’s word or to correct or supplement it, is replaying the part of Balaam and is lower than Balaam’s ass.

God’s every word stands, and men either stand or fall in terms of it.

Chapter Forty-Three
Balaam's Prophecies
(Numbers 23:1-30)

1. And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams.
2. And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram.
3. And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the LORD will come to meet me: and whatsoever he sheweth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place.
4. And God met Balaam: and he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram.
5. And the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak.
6. And he returned unto him, and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he, and all the princes of Moab.
7. And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.
8. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?
9. For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.
10. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!
11. And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether.
12. And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?
13. And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence.
14. And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.
15. And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet the LORD yonder.
16. And the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus.
17. And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, What hath the LORD spoken?
18. And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:

19. God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?
20. Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.
21. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.
22. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.
23. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!
24. Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.
25. And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.
26. But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?
27. And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence.
28. And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon.
29. And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams.
30. And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar. (Numbers 23:1-30)

Balaam's purposes were devious, and God knew that Balaam hoped to gain great wealth by cursing Israel. Israel saw itself as a nation, but, in verse 9, Balaam declares, inspired of God, "lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." In 1 Samuel 8:4-5, the elders of Israel, all of them, confronted Samuel, not with a demand for reform and for the removal from office of Samuel's corrupt sons, but with a desire to be "like all the nations." In the U.S. also, foreign religious and political practices have been steadily adopted to make the U.S. like other nations. Although the Constitution, for example, totally avoided the words, "sovereign" and "sovereignty," believing, as John Quincy Adams declared, rather in the sovereignty of God, the courts now routinely assert the sovereignty of the Federal Government. Here, Balaam finds himself declaring that Israel is not to be considered a nation; they are an elect and chosen people, comparable to the church after the resurrection and ascension.

Balaam had no desire to bless Israel; there was no money in displeasing Balak. God, however, used him, against his will, to speak as a prophet.

In some degree, the ability to speak beyond ourselves is not entirely uncommon. I have known persons who were normally fearful and unable to stand up to anyone, suddenly turn eloquent and make a mighty witness. Some years ago, a woman faced with a difficult situation and sure that she would be tongue-tied before a court, amazed herself by testifying with devastating clarity

and beyond her normal powers. Instead of timidity, she was clear, bold, and forthright and startled by her own testimony. The Lord sometimes blesses us with powers beyond ourselves.

In Balaam's case, he went through the form of satisfying God by ordering seven altars to be built, and seven oxen and seven rams sacrificed. The Lord confronted Balaam and put prophetic words in his mouth. The first prophecy is in vv. 7-10. He declares that we cannot curse whom God has not cursed or defied. He sees Israel, not merely as a vast encampment before him, but as the elect of God, past, present, and future, and he declares, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (v. 10).

The results of this prophecy were an outrage to Balak, and no doubt a shock to Balaam.

Three times Balak tried to get a curse on Israel through Balaam. On each occasion, Balak took Balaam to a different mountain top as the place where cursing would become possible. This is an important fact, and it is necessary that we understand its meaning, especially now that we have a widespread pagan revival, the worship of "Mother Earth," a stress on a variety of means of gaining ecstatic power, including nudity in the forests or mountains, and so on; just as lightning strikes high points, so do supernormal powers, it is held. *First*, naturalism in every era of history has affirmed a continuity between all things. This means that whatever supernatural or supernormal powers exist are by nature related to us and continuous with us in their being. Unless we are physically handicapped, our mind controls all aspects of our being. In the natural order, it is seen as necessary to make contact, whether by magic, science, or ritual, with the powers of the universe. Continuity with them, when established, means power and control. Modern science is increasingly related to magic, because its goal is control more than knowledge. By a change of location, Balak hoped for a better contact and a divination more agreeable to his purposes.

Second, implicit in all this is the belief that ultimate power can and should reside with the apex of the human order. This idea has many results. One has been the divine right of kings or of parliaments; another, academic freedom from outside controls or laws; still another, scientific immunity from moral controls, and so on. For those who so believe, the idea of an uncontrollable power is anathema. Because of this, the modern state seeks to control every area of life and thought. Balak's premises were the same as those of the modern state; the difference was that his "expert" in controls was Balaam, but both Balaam and Balak were in God's control, as are all men and things, both then and now.

Third, in v.3, Balaam tells Balak, "Stand by the burnt offering." In this, Balaam was faithful to God's requirements, however much he hoped to use God. When a man brought an animal sacrifice to God, he offered the animal as a substitute for himself, so that he in effect sacrificed himself to God. This was in faithfulness to Leviticus 17:11:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

The hope was that, by pleasing God in this respect, with the sacrifices, God would be pleased with Balak. At one point, Louis XIV said, “God seems to have forgotten all I have done for him.”¹⁴⁶ It is not uncommon for men to think that by certain acts, they have placed God and man under obligation to them. If you insist on the priority of God and His law, they are resentful. They believe that both God and man can be placed under obligation as their demands necessitate.

In the second of Balaam’s three prophecies, the predictions are more devastating. According to vv. 18-24,

18. ...Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor:
19. God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?
20. Behold, I have received commandment to bless; and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it.
21. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.
22. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn.
23. Surely, there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!
24. Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.

Balaam now is more prophetic than when he began. In this second prophecy, he begins with a declaration of the unchanging nature of God. As God declares centuries later to Malachi, “I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal. 3:6). Therefore, having received a commandment to bless whom God has blessed, Balaam cannot reverse God’s ways (vv. 19-20). The next statement is a very important one for us. God, Balaam says, has not beheld iniquity or perverseness in Israel. God’s word, however, gives us a record of both. Just as we, when we are in Christ, are judicially clean and guiltless before God, so, too, Israel stood in God’s atonement, not in its personal and national sins. This meant that God was Israel’s Judge and Redeemer, the great Vindicator. Israel has, as it were, the strength of a unicorn, according to the authorized version; the Hebrew word may mean a wild ox, or a buffalo (vv. 21-22). Even more, Israel is protected because the King of kings will be born through the line of this nation, and, prophetically, Balaam hears “the shout of a king ...among them” (v. 21), as of a triumphal procession. As a result, no human enchantment or divination is of any use, nor anything man can do. “What hath God wrought” is Balaam’s conclusion. Therefore, Israel shall now devour its enemies like a young and mighty lion (vv. 23-24).

This leads us, *fourth*, to another aspect of the change of places before each prophecy by Balaam. Some modern occultists believe that magnetic and other forces can be present at certain points, thereby furthering their own powers. Men then and now have seen God or whatever supernatural powers may exist as a vast reservoir of potentialities and powers. Thus, hoping to catch another face or aspect of God, a different site was chosen each time. This was a belief in contradictory potentialities in God as in men. We are all full of potentialities for all kinds of things; hence, the

old saying, “There but for the grace of God go I.” But potentiality and actuality are one in God; Van Til has often called attention to the implications of this fact. Balaam believed in God’s existence and power, but he did not truly know Him. Recently, I read a monograph by a churchman who despised all orthodox belief; for him, God was like a great minefield full of various ores to be mined, a magnificent resource rather than the supreme Person.

Then, *fifth*, in the light of all this, let us look again at v. 5, “And the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth.” The essence of Balak’s and Balaam’s hope was to put a word in God’s mouth, just as pagan praying in the church is an attempt to twist God’s arm by means of numbers, the “right” person, and so on; it is not the humble submission of our Lord: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42).

God is not a resource but our Sovereign Creator, our Lord.

Balak’s reaction was anger: “Neither curse them at all, or bless them at all” (v. 25). In other words, get out. Balaam tried to justify himself, saying, “Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?” (v. 26). The words were right, but Balaam was not, and Balak saw this. As a result, he decided on another site, the top of Peor, as a place where hopefully an element in the Godhead more favorable to him could be tapped. Balaam was clearly willing to make a try, still hoping for a great reward. As a result, seven more altars were built, and seven more rams and bullocks sacrificed (vv. 29-30).

Chapter Forty-Four
The “Star out of Jacob,” Part 1
(*Numbers 24:1-19*)

1. And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness.
2. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him.
3. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:
4. He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:
5. How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!
6. As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.
7. He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.
8. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows.
9. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.
10. And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times.
11. Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour.
12. And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying,
- 13 If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak?
14. And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days.
15. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:
16. He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:
17. I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.
18. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.

19. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. (Numbers 24:1-19)

We come now to the third and fourth prophecies of Balaam. He had come to see that God was not permitting him to compromise, and so now he determined to go through with all that God required of him, at least for the moment.

The *third* prophecy, in vv. 5-9, is prefixed by the statement in vv. 1-4 that Balaam now discarded all the occult rites whereby he had previously sought power and control over God. Until now, we had not been openly told that he had made such attempts, but all men, in every age, who seek to control God resort to some kind of method whereby they hope to twist God's arm. Now, with his eyes fully opened in the religious sense, Balaam for the moment recognized that God controlled him, not he, God. All false religions, whatever names they bear, are marked by this hope, somehow to control God. Some have in the Christian era repeatedly formulated doctrines of the church which in effect have as their purpose to channel God through their institution. This is a form of idolatry.

Balaam's words begin with a glowing description of Israel. The encampment is viewed from on high, the lovely trees and waters within and around Israel's location. This is taken as a sign of its future, a blessed one (v. 5-6). Then Balaam speaks of Israel's posterity or seed, as pouring out by the bucketfuls: "...his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted." Abraham had been told that his posterity, meaning those sharing his faith, would be as the stars, innumerable (Gen. 15:5). Both predictions look at God's faithful people in every age, past, present, and future.

The strength of God's people will be like that of a unicorn, that is, a wild ox or buffalo. They shall totally destroy their enemies, crushing them as though they were nothing before them. God's people are also compared once again to a great lion, whom no one in their right mind will arouse (vv. 8-9).

Then, Balaam says, of the Israel of God, the true Kingdom of God in every age, "Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee" (v. 9). God's Kingdom is that by which men and nations stand or fall. We are given the key to the theology of blessing and cursing in Genesis 12:1-3:

1. Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, and unto a land that I will shew thee:
2. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
3. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

The *first* premise of God's statement is the requirement of obedience. A break must be made with his family and past in terms of doing the will of God. God's calling of Abram was an act of sovereign grace; Abram's response had to be obedience.

Second, given this obedience, God will build His Kingdom on Abram's faith and make of him a great nation, into the Kingdom of God. Faithful Abram and his faithful seed shall be a blessing to all the world. Abram's seed is Christ (Gal. 3:16), and in Christ, "they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3:9).

Third, all families or nations of the earth shall be blessed by Abraham's seed, Christ, and He shall be the premise in terms of which all men and nations are blessed or cursed.

At this point, we have the great error of Israel, past and present, and of many churches. Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz has written, of vv. 17-20, that earlier editions of Sforzo's commentary on the Torah dropped his statement. He writes:

We assume that the censor removed the commentary on these verses because it was considered too harsh an indictment of the Christian world's treatment of the Jews, and depicts too vividly the revenge that Israel will take of them at the end of time.¹⁴⁷

Within recent weeks, I have heard of churches making similar condemnations. Because the church is called the body of Christ in Scripture, these false churches make some very ungodly conclusions. *First*, they assume that, because they bear the name of a church, this makes them the body of Christ. There can be a vast difference between a name and reality. *Second*, even where the church is truly Christ's body, it is still not Jesus Christ. *Third*, the premise of cursing or excommunication is not the church, nor our relationship to it, but Christ and our relationship to Him. To go beyond this is idolatry, and it begs for God's curse.

Balak was very angry with Balaam but was afraid to touch him. He therefore ordered him to "flee thou to thy place" before Balak's anger led him to rash actions (v. 10-11). He was afraid of "bad luck" if he moved against a seer. Balaam reminded him that he had been told that only the words God gave could be spoken.

Balaam, possessed by God, delivered now a *fourth* prophecy in vv. 15-19. His eyes were now fully open, Balaam said; i.e., God was giving him a vision of what would happen through Israel (vv. 15-17). The center of the prediction is vv. 17-19:

17. I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

18. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.

19. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.

Because out of Israel, and some time in the future, ("not now"), a great King shall arise out of Israel, no nation shall be able to stand before Him. He is called a Star, an ancient sign of kingship, and a "Sceptre," the sign of rule and dominion. Therefore Moab, Edom, and all Israel's enemies shall be destroyed, and the Kingdom of the great King will alone remain. This

prediction clearly centers on Christ, as even the ancient Hebrews recognized. As E. W. Hengstenberg pointed out,

How widely this opinion was spread among the Jews, is sufficiently apparent from the circumstance, that the renowned pseudo-Messiah in the time of Hadrian adopted, with reference to the passage under review, the surname *Barcochba*, i.e., Son of the Star. From the Jews, this interpretation very soon passed over to the Christians, who rightly found a warrant for it in the narrative of the star of the wise men from the East.¹⁴⁸

It is an interesting sidelight on the history of this false messiah, Bar Kochba, Son of the Star, that his military successes were great, and his fanatical followers were fierce fighters. Rome then adopted a strategy that destroyed Bar Kochba's regime. He had minted attractive copper coins and placed a high value on them, as though they were gold and silver. Rome counterfeited Bar Kochba's coins, flooded Israel with them, and thereby broke his regime economically and then militarily.

Hengstenberg said, with respect to the Star out of Jacob,

The Messianic character of the prophecy being thus established, it will be impossible to misunderstand the internal relation between the star of Balaam and the star of the wise men from the East. The star of Balaam is the emblem of the kingdom which will rise in Israel. The star of the Magi is the symbol of the Ruler in whom the kingly power appears concentrated. The appearance of the star embodying the image of the prophet, indicates that the last and highest fulfillment of his prophecies is now to take place.¹⁴⁹

We know, of course, that the wise men came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" (Matt. 2:2).

It is important now to return to the question of blessings and curses. Again citing Hengstenberg, he very tellingly observed, "The lot of every people corresponds to the nature of their God."¹⁵⁰ Our present condition, and that of the whole world, corresponds to the nature of our humanistic gods. The world crisis of our time can be traced to this fact. Men have over the centuries had false gods, bad religions, and warped theologies, but perhaps rarely have people been more earnestly dedicated to furthering evil as though it were the highest good.

John Roberts has observed, "Acceleration is the one obvious overriding trend in modern history."¹⁵¹ Because of that fact, the false gods of our time have attained a wider influence than normally would have been the case.

This will only bring upon them all the more rapidly the judgment of Almighty God.

Chapter Forty-Five

The “Star out of Jacob,” Part 2 (Numbers 24:15-19)

15. And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:

16. He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open:

17. I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

18. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.

19. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. (Numbers 24:15- 19)

These verses are an important prophecy of the coming of Christ the King. They are closely related to Genesis 3:15, where the evil one is told:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

These words tell us, *first*, that the woman’s seed shall in due time come, the great Deliverer, Jesus Christ. He shall “bruise,” or, better, crush the enemy’s head, and all that the enemy can do is to crush His heel. Christ’s crucifixion was this bruising, but His atoning death, His resurrection, His triumph through His Kingdom and people, and His triumphal Judgment at the end of history shall crush Satan’s power forever.

Second, we are told that there is *enmity* between God and His enemies, and between us and the enemies of Christ. People resent any reference to such an enmity; they insist on equating “good religion” with living at peace with all kinds of men and evils. Yet, Ron and Lesha Myers tell us that the graffiti in Concord, California, after the defeat of Christians recently (1991) reads, “kill Christians.” For me, one of the most disgusting events of 1991 has been the many protests over John Lofton’s article. In witnessing to an unbelieving waitress he made her cry. This made him a monster to many. How can you confront people with their sins, and the sin of unbelief, without arousing anger, tears, resentment, or repentance? I have made some people cry, for their own good, and deeply angered others, by telling them they are sinners, *enemies of God*. This can lead to conversion, or to resentment and self-pity. Too many people equate “good religion” with being nice to everybody. *This is evil*. If we want peace with all men, we cannot have peace with God.

At the time of this prophecy, Edom (Seir) and Moab stood out as enemies of God’s purposes. Their future (vv. 17-19) is to be crushed by God’s Messiah, the Star or King carrying the scepter of world dominion.

We are told, He “shall destroy him that remaineth of the city” (v. 19). For us the city has become a center of crime and corruption, and the enemies of the city are those within its boundaries. At one time, with walled cities, every city was regarded as a place of safety and refuge. This statement tells us that there is no hiding place from God the Son. No man can escape from the triune God. In David’s words,

7. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?
8. If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.
9. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;
10. Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.
11. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.
12. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. (Psalm 139:7-12)

There are no safe places from God, no hiding place in all the world, or in our own minds and hearts, from Him.

This prophecy of Christ’s coming calls sharp attention both to the fact of enmity *and* to the fact of Christ’s assured victory. He shall “destroy all the children (or, sons) of Sheth,” i.e., the sons of tumult.

Then, *third*, this is all necessary, because He is the great King, the King of righteousness or justice, who holds the scepter of world dominion. We are told in Psalm 72:8,

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.

St. Paul speaks of Christ as “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). The word *only* is a translation of the Greek *monos*, an adjective often used to describe God (John 5:44, 17:3; Romans 16:27; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:16; Jude 4, 25; Revelation 15:4). Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:24-27 that, *before* Christ’s return and the end of history, He, through His people, shall have “put down all rule and all authority and power” outside of Him, “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” Then “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

We are told, in Proverbs 8:36, that all they that hate God love death. Ironically, Sigmund Freud held that the will to death is far stronger than the will to life; he was accurately describing fallen man.

Now this is closely related to our Lord’s birth. According to Matthew 2:1-3,

1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2. Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.
3. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

We should expect a seasoned reprobate like Herod to be troubled, but not a city of priests and a vast multitude of Jews who prided themselves as being God's chosen people. The word translated as *troubled* can also be rendered as *agitated* or *alarmed*. It was one thing to worship a far-off God and Messiah, another to have Him entering one's territory! They all wanted Him dead.

Herod's subsequent slaughter of all the children in the Bethlehem area, two years old and under (Matt. 2:16), aroused no protest from the leaders of the people. They all knew, from Herod on down, that the Messiah would be the great King, the holder of all dominion, and this they all found intolerable. Their attitude, as our Lord describes it in a parable, was simply this: "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). This is also the attack of many churchmen.

But they could not stop His coming, nor His Kingdom. Century after century, the ungodly have raged against Christ and His people, but His Kingdom goes marching on, and His enemies perish.

Meanwhile, Paul reminds us, in Romans 16:20, of the promise in Genesis 3:15:

And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Christ has come. Therefore, Paul assures us, certain things follow. *First*, Paul describes God as "the God of peace." In Genesis 3:15, an irreconcilable enmity and conflict are described between the two humanities, the two camps, Christ's and fallen man's. Peace is not to come through surrender but through Christ's victory, and the Hebrew word for peace, *Shalom*, means in part restitution. *Second*, our God will crush or destroy Satan under our feet. As against Rome and all the powers of Paul's day and ours, Christ shall triumph in and through us. We have been called to victory (1 John 5:4). The word *shortly*, *third*, is in the Greek *tachei*, which means *quickly*. This has puzzled many, who see only a long continuing battle. Godet's commentary makes clear the meaning; the meaning of *tachei* is swiftly, but not soon:

Paul means, therefore, not that the victory will be near, but that it will be *speedily* gained, once the conflict is begun. When the believer fights with the armor of God (Eph. VI.), the conflict is never long. — Victory will result from two factors, the one divine (*God shall bruise*), the other human (*under your feet*). God communicates strength; but it passes through the man who accepts and uses it.¹⁵²

To gain this victory, we must wage the war. Too many want victory without war, as though eloquence, patriotic or religious gush, ever overcame an enemy.

Thus, *fourth*, we have Paul's benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." With the addition of the word "all," this benediction is repeated a few sentences later, in Romans 16:24. Paul is usually cryptic and never wordy, so this repetition is surprising. The implication, however, is clear: to crush Satan's head under our feet, to destroy the power of Christ's enemies in every age, we need a total reliance on the grace of our Lord. After all, we are not the King, the Star of Jacob, nor do we hold the Sceptre of world dominion. We cannot fight alone. The birth of our Lord is our assurance that we are not alone: He is Immanuel, God with us, and in His grace, in faithfulness to His commandments, we are strong. Then alone we "shall do valiantly" and crush the power of God's enemies.

Chapter Forty-Six

Amalek

(*Numbers 24:20-25*)

20. And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.
21. And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwellingplace, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock.
22. Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive.
23. And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!
24. And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever.
25. And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way. (*Numbers 24:20-25*)

In the *Institutes of Biblical Law* (vol. 1), I devoted three chapters or sections to the meaning of Amalek in the Bible. Hengstenberg sums up the significance here of the reference in this final prophecy of Balaam of Amalek: “The Amalekite kingdom...here represents the world power, opposed to the kingdom of God.” They are called the *first* of the nations, the most powerful of them.¹⁵³

The nation gained its name from Amalek, a descendant of Esau (Gen. 36:12), and, like Esau, a reprobate, with his descendants manifesting a deep hatred for God. Amalek is the type of all peoples, persons, and nations at war with God. Paul says, in Romans 8:7, “Because the carnal (or, fallen) mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” James Moffatt rendered it thus: “For the interests of the flesh (i.e., fallen humanity) are hostile to God; they do not yield to the law of God (indeed they cannot).” In other words, unregenerate man is by nature an antinomian where the law of God is concerned.

For Amalek, this hostility and enmity was highly self-conscious. The Amalekites went out of their way to show their hatred for God, and Hebrew accounts give us a horrifying depiction of this. We therefore see Amalek in men and nations over the centuries who reveal a militant hatred for God, men like Stalin and Hitler, as well as some of our own leaders and peoples.

One of the many errors of Aristotle which still plagues us is the belief in a particular form of government as the ideal one. The three basic forms, according to Aristotle, are monarchy, aristocracy (sometimes called critically an oligarchy), and democracy. Each of these three, with internal variations and modifications, has been tried, such as a constitutional monarchy, or a constitutional democracy, or a republic, and so on and on.

The fallacy in all such thinking is that some technical arrangement of men will produce a good society. More than once I have been told plaintively by someone, “Why can’t people live together in peace?” It is not really a question, because such people usually have their own agenda

for living in peace. My answer is: Men cannot live in peace because they are either lost sinners, at war with God, man, and themselves, or saved sinners, still far from perfectly sanctified and still full of self-will; it is not a political arrangement that will give world peace, but Jesus Christ alone. This is not a pleasing answer.

The world is full of men who have their technical solution to the problem of peace: United Nations, Europe or the European Economic Community, world Marxism, Islamic world rule, and so on and on. But there is no peace apart from Jesus Christ. To seek peace on any other basis is a childish and sinful illusion; it is sin. Zacharias, the priest, said of the child born to him, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, that he would proclaim the coming of “the dayspring (or, sunrising) from on high,”

To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:79)

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:14 that Jesus Christ “is our peace.” If we seek peace on humanistic grounds, and if we attempt to establish a just social order apart from the triune God and His word, we have moved into the camp of Amalek.

For ancient Amalek, triumph meant showing contempt for God. According to Midrashic lore, behind the general statement of Deuteronomy 25:18 was the fact that Amalek seized all living Hebrew prisoners, and dead ones as well, to castrate them and toss their organs into the air, shouting obscene curses to God and shouting, “This is what you like, so take what you have chosen.”¹⁵⁴ In our day, in stage, screen, television, politics, and everyday life, blasphemies are commonplace as our modern Amalekites express their hatred for God.

We are then told in v. 22 that “the Kenites shall be wasted.” Now another portion of the Kenites joined themselves to Israel (Jer. 35:1- 11) and therefore shared their future; these were the Rechabites (1 Chron. 2:55, a verse that makes it clear that a portion of the Kenites are meant). Those Kenites who did not separate themselves unto the God of Israel are thus classed with Amalek. These ungodly Kenites, (with ungodly Israel), were to be carried away captive by Asshur, or Assyria (v. 22).

We are then told that ships shall come from the coast of Chittim (or Kittim), probably the modern Cypress; these were a Phoenician people. They will afflict in time Asshur, the Eastern Semites, and Eber, the Western Semites. But Chittim will only be a tool in God’s hand, “and he also shall perish for ever” (v. 24). God in His time will destroy all Amalekites.

All these amazing predictions come from the mouth of Balaam, a man who had no intention of serving God. In John Urquhart’s words,

Balaam puts money and honour that cometh from man in God’s place; and so God must now deal with him as the servant of another, putting bands upon him, and restrictions around him, so that, though gone from God’s service, he may nevertheless not interfere with the carrying out of God’s purpose.¹⁵⁵

All men shall serve God, willingly or unwillingly. His will shall be done, on earth even as in heaven (Matt. 6:10). As Asaph, the psalmist, tells us, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psalm 76:10). The Lord God will use all of man’s raging and all of his sin to accomplish His sovereign purpose.

Balaam’s purposes had become Satanic. Balaam died later fighting for Midian against Israel (Numbers 31:8). We are told in Numbers 24:25 that Balaam had returned to his home, some distance away, but apparently he had returned to work again for Balak. In Numbers 25, we see that Israel became involved in extensive immorality, ritual prostitution, in accordance with the practices of Baal-peor. Since Balaam died fighting for Midian, it is a reasonable assumption that Balaam was behind the strategy of corrupting Israel, and alienating it from God, by suggesting that Israel be flooded with ritual or temple prostitutes. It was a clever strategy, and, for a time, successful; we are told, in fact, that this was Balaam’s plan in Numbers 25.

In v. 23, we have Balaam’s cry of horror as he sees the future under God’s inspiration: “Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!” Walter Riggans renders it thus: “Alas, who shall live when God appoints him (a time)?”¹⁵⁶ In other words, when God so thoroughly orders and predestines history that the remotest future simply manifests His will, how then shall man live? Balaam’s idea of life is that of the tempter, every man his own god, knowing or determining for himself his own life and law, good and evil, morality and immorality. If God’s law and power determine all things, man cannot be his own lord and sovereign, only God’s tool, instrument, or servant. We live in a time when it is no longer acknowledged, as it was by some institutional psychiatrists in my student days, that some inmates eat their own feces because they thereby want, they say, to defile God by defiling His image in man.

The cry of the world against Christ, and against “the great Christian revolution,” is always this: Alas, who shall live when God is absolute lord and sovereign? How then can we realize our own potentiality? How can we be our own gods?

What had come home to Balaam as he predicted the end of Amalek was his own end: he was at heart an Amalekite. The Amalekites are with us still, in the church in pulpit and pew, and outside the church. Their venomous hatred for God and His Christ have only increased. “But his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.” We are the people called unto victory in Christ (1 John 5:4).

Chapter Forty-Seven

Phinehas

(Numbers 25:1-18)

1. And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.
2. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.
3. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.
4. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel.
5. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor.
6. And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.
7. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand;
8. And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel.
9. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.
10. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
11. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.
12. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace:
13. And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.
14. Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites.
15. And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian.
16. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
17. Vex the Midianites, and smite them:
18. For they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake. (Numbers 25:1-18)

There are two references to this chapter in the New Testament, in 2 Peter 2:15, and especially in Revelation 2:14, where we are clearly told that Balaam was responsible for this event. He had apparently told the Midianites that their religious prostitution would be the means of destroying Israel, an enemy to both Balak and Moab, and to Midian as well. The religious communion services of Midian were full-scale feasts, followed by religious acts of fornication whereby the people “joined” themselves to Baal-peor.

In other words, we have here a fertility cult, and its open practice, to which the Israelites were invited. Fertility cults were all naturalistic religions, given to worshipping the life force, and commonly embodying it in a goddess, a female figure. The revived cult of Gaia is closely related to such a faith, and it involved the open practice of sexual acts, including, in many instances, deviant and bestial practices.

For the men of Israel, this was an invitation to free sex, and they went after it greedily, with little opposition until God through Moses ordered an intervention. The text is rather difficult at points, and perhaps Moffatt’s rendering of vv. 4-5 will make it clear:

4. And the Eternal bade Moses seize all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Eternal, in order to avert the Eternal’s hot anger from Israel.
5. So Moses told all the sheriffs to put to death throughout their jurisdictions the men who had attached themselves to the Baal of Peor.

Because of their permissiveness, the tribal princes were all held to be responsible.

Meanwhile, a plague was racing through Israel, and, in v. 9 we are told that about 24,000 died in this epidemic. This is a rounded figure. In 1 Corinthians 10:8, we have a reference to this incident, and the rounded figure is given as 23,000. More importantly, we are told that they “fell in one day.” This is a fact that intrigues medical scholars, I am told, especially now, in the time of the AIDS epidemic. This plague was apparently associated with the promiscuity and struck very rapidly but was ignored by the Israelites in their eagerness for easy access to Midianite women. Many, of course, were distressed and were weeping at the door of the sanctuary (v. 6), perhaps mainly the Hebrew wives.

Josephus wrote that Zimri expressed his contempt for Moses, called him a worse oppressor than Pharaoh, and said that Moses was trying to deprive them “of the sweetness of life, which consists in acting according to our own wills, and is the right of free men, and of those who have no lord over them.” He accused Moses of acting “under pretense of laws, and of God, wickedly (to) impose on us slavery, and gain dominion to thyself.”¹⁵⁷

These events occurred at Abel-Shittim, a meadow of acacia trees, and a pleasant setting.

We are told that the Midianites “called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods.” A.R.S. Kennedy rendered *called* as *invited*.¹⁵⁸ The destruction of Israel was disguised as a friendly act; the purpose, as apparently designed by Balaam, was to subvert the people and alienate them from God. Their long isolation in the wilderness made them especially susceptible to whatever plague

the sexual promiscuity gave them, whereas the Midianites had apparently some high degree of tolerance to it. It is a grim fact that we are not told that Israel was at all concerned by the plague. This is clearly indicated by George Bush's commentary in part on v. 3:

Israel joined himself to Baal-peor. Heb., "Was joined, coupled, or yoked." Vulg. "Israel was initiated to Beelphegor." Gr. "Israel was consecrated to Beelphegor." Chald. "Israel was conjoined to the worshippers of Baal-peor." Syr. And Arab. "Israel cleaved closely to Baal-Pheor."¹⁵⁹

In other words, Zimri's response to Moses as given by Josephus did reflect Israel's temperament: here was a religion more to their liking than the God of Moses. People were dying even as they celebrated their freedom from God. The parallel to the AIDS epidemic is certainly there, whatever the nature of this plague.

In this seduction of Israel, Midian and Moab worked together. In vv. 1, 17-18, we see this clearly. Some scholars believe that the number 23,000 refers to those who died of the plague, whereas 24,000 is inclusive of those hung by Moses's orders.¹⁶⁰

Robert A. Watson wrote, of Balaam's strategy:

The moral law of Jehovah and the comparative purity of the Israelites as His people kept them separate from the other nations, gave them dignity and vigour. To break down this defence would make them like the rest, would withdraw them from the favour of their God and even defeat His purposes. The scheme was one which only the vilest craft could have conceived; and it shows us too plainly the real character of Balaam. He must have known the power of the allurements which he now advised as the means of attack on those he could not touch with his maledictions nor gain by his soothsaying. In the shadow of this scheme of his we see the diviner and all his tribe, and indeed the whole morality of the region, at their very worst.¹⁶¹

It is important to note that in fertility religions, all sexual acts, in some instances inclusive of perverse and bestial acts, were seen as *good works*. They insured the fertility of the earth, the coming of rains, and a good harvest. Nowadays "sanitized" versions of fertility cult practices are performed for tourists by many peoples and tribes and are highly regarded by our new pagans. Sacred prostitution was a routine part of pagan cults in Canaan; it was a particularly well developed aspect of that culture. However, other cultures have not lacked their temple prostitutes, as witness Hinduism; no other culture in the modern world has given them an equal status. In antiquity, a father would often dedicate a daughter to the temple for sacred prostitution; the same could be true of sons. In Deuteronomy 23:17-18, there is a strict ban on any form of prostitution, sacred or profane, and the sodomite is called a *dog*, a term also used in Revelation 22:15. According to Deuteronomy 23:17-18,

17. There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.

18. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

The plague on Israel was stayed by Phinehas in what is called an act of atonement (v. 13), a satisfaction for sin. It is important to understand that this was not a vigilante act. The order was given (vv. 4-5) to hang all the leaders of the people who had led in and tolerated the fertility cult practices. Now, after this was done, Zimri, a son of Salu, a prince of a chief house of the Simeonites (v. 14), brazenly defied the authority of Moses. He brought a prominent Midianite woman, Cozbi, the daughter of Zur, a prince of Midian, into the camp. He did so openly, and the godly women of Israel wept at the sight.

At this point, Phinehas, a high priestly official and probably one of those involved in the hanging of other guilty leaders, took a javelin and went into the tent where they were copulating. He drove his javelin through the bodies of both and killed them on the spot. God praises Phinehas for being as zealous of His honor as God Himself is for His laws and honor (v. 13). Since the New Testament describes Phinehas as a godly man, this poses a problem for those who try to place the Old Testament on a lower moral level!

The aftermath of Phinehas's act was, *first*, that God stayed the plague. The contagions ended, as did the fertility cult practices. If any still agreed with Zimri, they kept quiet!

Second, God promised to Phinehas and his posterity a "covenant of peace." They would continue in His service and be blessed therein (vv. 11-13).

Third, since a Midianite princess had been killed, war would follow, and God ordered Moses to take the initiative, which he did, although a full-scale war was delayed, since Israel's manpower had been diminished by the plague. Apparently, as with AIDS thus far, men were the primary victims.

Modern commentators, such as James Philip, have called Phinehas's act, and others like it in the Bible, "acts of a brutal and barbarous nature."¹⁶² Are we to assume that the breakdown of civilization taking place under the leadership of our modernists represents civility and culture? Where are their condemnations of the pornography, abortion, euthanasia, crime, and lawlessness of our time?

Zimri was a Simeonite, and the Simeonite encampment was closest to Moab and most exposed to the Midianite temptation. The census in Numbers 26 shows that the Simeonites had the greatest loss in population.

A comment by Gosman in Lange's commentary is pertinent here:

The history shows that the "curse causeless never comes." God's people are safe from the curse unless they bring it upon themselves. They never experience it unless they have practically renounced God and His law. The floodgates are open, then, and nothing but a vindicated divine right will stem the tide.¹⁶³

The curse causeless never comes, but our age has invited God's curse and needs to repent.

Chapter Forty-Eight

The Second Census

(Numbers 26:1-65)

1. And it came to pass after the plague, that the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying,
2. Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their father's house, all that are able to go to war in Israel.
3. And Moses and Eleazar the priest spake with them in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying,
4. Take the sum of the people, from twenty years old and upward; as the LORD commanded Moses and the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt.
5. Reuben, the eldest son of Israel: the children of Reuben; Hanoch, of whom cometh the family of the Hanochites: of Pallu, the family of the Palluites:
6. Of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites: of Carmi, the family of the Carmites.
7. These are the families of the Reubenites: and they that were numbered of them were forty and three thousand and seven hundred and thirty.
8. And the sons of Pallu; Eliab.
9. And the sons of Eliab; Nemuel, and Dathan, and Abiram. This is that Dathan and Abiram, which were famous in the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the LORD:
10. And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, what time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men: and they became a sign.
11. Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not.
12. The sons of Simeon after their families: of Nemuel, the family of the Nemuelites: of Jamin, the family of the Jaminites: of Jachin, the family of the Jachinites:
13. Of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites: of Shaul, the family of the Shaulites.
14. These are the families of the Simeonites, twenty and two thousand and two hundred.
15. The children of Gad after their families: of Zephon, the family of the Zephonites: of Haggi, the family of the Haggites: of Shuni, the family of the Shunites:
16. Of Ozni, the family of the Oznites: of Eri, the family of the Erites:
17. Of Arod, the family of the Arodites: of Areli, the family of the Arelites.
18. These are the families of the children of Gad according to those that were numbered of them, forty thousand and five hundred.
19. The sons of Judah were Er and Onan: and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan.
20. And the sons of Judah after their families were; of Shelah, the family of the Shelanites: of Pharez, the family of the Pharezites: of Zerah, the family of the Zarhites.

21. And the sons of Pharez were; of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites: of Hamul, the family of the Hamulites.
22. These are the families of Judah according to those that were numbered of them, threescore and sixteen thousand and five hundred.
23. Of the sons of Issachar after their families: of Tola, the family of the Tolaites: of Pua, the family of the Punites:
24. Of Jashub, the family of the Jashubites: of Shimron, the family of the Shimronites.
25. These are the families of Issachar according to those that were numbered of them, threescore and four thousand and three hundred.
26. Of the sons of Zebulun after their families: of Sered, the family of the Sardites: of Elon, the family of the Elonites: of Jahleel, the family of the Jahleelites.
27. These are the families of the Zebulunites according to those that were numbered of them, threescore thousand and five hundred.
28. The sons of Joseph after their families were Manasseh and Ephraim.
29. Of the sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites: and Machir begat Gilead: of Gilead come the family of the Gileadites.
30. These are the sons of Gilead: of Jeezer, the family of the Jeezerites: of Helek, the family of the Helekites:
31. And of Asriel, the family of the Asrielites: and of Shechem, the family of the Shechemites:
32. And of Shemida, the family of the Shemidaïtes: and of Hephher, the family of the Hephherites.
33. And Zelophehad the son of Hephher had no sons, but daughters: and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.
34. These are the families of Manasseh, and those that were numbered of them, fifty and two thousand and seven hundred.
35. These are the sons of Ephraim after their families: of Shuthelah, the family of the Shuthalhites: of Becher, the family of the Bachrites: of Tahan, the family of the Tahanites.
36. And these are the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the family of the Eranites.
37. These are the families of the sons of Ephraim according to those that were numbered of them, thirty and two thousand and five hundred. These are the sons of Joseph after their families.
38. The sons of Benjamin after their families: of Bela, the family of the Belaites: of Ashbel, the family of the Ashbelites: of Ahiram, the family of the Ahiramites:
39. Of Shupham, the family of the Shuphamites: of Hupham, the family of the Huphamites.
40. And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: of Ard, the family of the Ardites: and of Naaman, the family of the Naamites.
41. These are the sons of Benjamin after their families: and they that were numbered of them were forty and five thousand and six hundred.
42. These are the sons of Dan after their families: of Shuham, the family of the Shuhamites. These are the families of Dan after their families.

43. All the families of the Shuhamites, according to those that were numbered of them, were threescore and four thousand and four hundred.

44. Of the children of Asher after their families: of Jimna, the family of the Jimnites: of Jesui, the family of the Jesuites: of Beriah, the family of the Beriites.

45. Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the family of the Heberites: of Malchiel, the family of the Malchielites.

46. And the name of the daughter of Asher was Sarah.

47. These are the families of the sons of Asher according to those that were numbered of them; who were fifty and three thousand and four hundred.

48. Of the sons of Naphtali after their families: of Jahzeel, the family of the Jahzeelites: of Guni, the family of the Gunites:

49. Of Jezer, the family of the Jezerites: of Shillem, the family of the Shillemites.

50. These are the families of Naphtali according to their families: and they that were numbered of them were forty and five thousand and four hundred.

51. These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty.

52. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

53. Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names.

54. To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his 286 *Numbers: Faith, Law, and History* inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him.

55. Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit.

56. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few.

57. And these are they that were numbered of the Levites after their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites: of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites: of Merari, the family of the Merarites.

58. These are the families of the Levites: the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, the family of the Korathites. And Kohath begat Amram.

59. And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister.

60. And unto Aaron was born Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

61. And Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before the LORD.

62. And those that were numbered of them were twenty and three thousand, all males from a month old and upward: for they were not numbered among the children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given them among the children of Israel.

63. These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho.

64. But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai.

65. For the LORD had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. (Numbers 26:1-65)

We have now a census of fighting men as Israel prepares for the invasion of Canaan. We are told in vv. 63-65 that none of these men, other than Moses, Caleb, and Joshua, were in the first census made by Moses and Aaron. This one was conducted under the authority of Moses and Eleazar. The figures are as follows:

Tribe	First Census	Second Census
Reuben	46,500	43,730
Simeon	59,300	22,300
Gad	45,650	40,500
Judah	74,600	76,500
Issachar	54,400	64,300
Zebulun	57,400	60,500
Manasseh	32,200	52,700
Ephraim	40,500	32,500
Benjamin	35,400	45,600
Dan	62,700	64,400
Asher	41,500	53,400
Naphthali	53,400	45,400
TOTAL	603,550	601,830 ¹⁶⁴

The judgments of God had taken their toll, so that the number of fighting men had decreased by almost 2,000 in a generation. The tribes who lost were Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, and Naphthali, five clans in all. The gainers were Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, and Asher, seven clans in all. The major loss was sustained by Simeon, which had been most involved in the fertility cult apostasy (Numbers 25). It was now the smallest clan; Judah retained its priority, although its gain was small. The major growth was in Manasseh, which increased over sixty percent.

In vv. 52-56, we are given the rules for the division of the land once it was conquered. *First* of all, the larger the tribe or clan, the more territory it would receive. This census thus both served a military purpose and provided a basis for the division of the land. *Second*, the general area each

clan would receive would be determined by drawing lots. The boundaries would be determined by these two factors.

In v. 33, we read that Zelophehad, of the clan Manasseh, had no sons, but he did have five daughters. In chapters 27 and 36, their inheritance is cited. Normally, the oldest godly son, who was also responsible and capable, received the double portion in an inheritance. Since, however, the premise of Biblical inheritance laws is the capitalization of God's Kingdom, the godly child takes priority, whether male or female. Caleb clearly made his daughter Achsah his heir (Judges 1:12-15).

In vv. 58-62, we have the census of the Levites. In this instance, instead of an enumeration of fighting men of twenty years and over, all males from a month upward are numbered, 23,000 in all. They received no allotment of land, but they were settled instead in the cities and scattered among the twelve tribes or clans. They were to provide the religious, moral, and educational leadership in Israel.

There was a *third* factor in the division of the land. Each area was to be named after one of the twelve sons of Jacob, i.e., after the original head of the clan. There was thus a territorial integrity between the tribes, and a clan loyalty established (v. 55).

This census not only looks ahead to the occupation, but it is also a reminder of the past. Thus, v. 61 tell us,

And Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before the LORD.

Levi had the privilege of receiving the tithes and offerings of Israel, of which a tenth went to the priest (Numbers 18:25-32). To remind them of the necessity for faithfulness and obedience, they are here faced again with the judgment of God on those who offend Him and are presumptuous.

The reminder in v. 65 that, apart from Caleb and Joshua (Moses would die before the invasion of Canaan), none of the adults who left Egypt were still alive, tells us that God keeps His word: His judgment felled a generation and prevented their entrance into Canaan. This did not ensure the character of the younger generation, but it did mean that God keeps His promises, whether they be to bless or to curse.

We see "the past receding, the future advancing, and God the sole abiding link between them."¹⁶⁵ History collapses into existentialism when and where God and faith in Him are forgotten. The binding between past, present, and future is God the Lord and His providential purpose. Without that faith, not only is a sense of history lost but also a sense of causality. The author of a recently published book held that it was wrong to blame prostitutes for the spread of AIDS; an academic journal has blamed Christians, not homosexuals, for the AIDS epidemic. This is, to put it mildly, a loss of any sense of history and causality. Not surprisingly, instruction in causality is not a part of modern education. Our modern humanists believe that the world and history are what man makes them to be, not what God ordains. One arrogant professor, Richard Hern, has titled a recent book, *The Invention of the Real*. Its absurdities are in line with the modern loss of reality.

The emphasis on the allocation of the land by tribes or clans is important. Both in the form of their encampment in the wilderness, and soon in the allocation of land, clan integrity is obviously stressed. To what extent tribal loyalties had been broken or damaged in Egypt, we do not know, except that the clans survived more or less intact. Community is important to God, and community on the human level must accompany community with God. The census and the proposed allocation of the land alike stress the community of the family and the clan.

Joseph Parker made a telling comment on this census:

God is always numbering. He may number to find out who are present, but in numbering to find out who are present he soon comes to know who are absent. He knows the total number, but it is not enough for him to know the totality: he must know whether David's place is empty, whether the younger son has gone from the father's house, whether one piece of silver out of ten has been lost, whether one sheep out of a hundred has gone astray. We are all of consequence to the Father, because he does not look upon us through the glory of his majesty but through the solicitude of his fatherhood and his love. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; it were better for a man that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea, than that he should offend—wound the heart of—one of these little ones. So, everywhere we find God concerning himself with individuals, with single families, with solitary lives,—stopping in marvelous condescension, sweeping the house diligently until he finds the one piece that was lost. We need this kind of thought in human life: living would be weary work without it.¹⁶⁶

Our Lord declares, “the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matt. 10:30). This is not hyperbole: it is intended to be taken very literally. What Scripture tells us in numerous ways, among them this census, is of God's particularity as well as His universality. False religions are very prone to stress universality with glittering generalities, all of which are without substance because the particular is ignored. Many pretentious thinkers despise the Bible and find it uncomfortable reading because of God's precise and total particularity. It is precisely this particularity that is the glory of our faith. Thus, we read, in Matthew 10:42,

And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

We are likewise assured that God's judgments are particular and total.

The twelve tribes or clans had been encamped around the Levites and the sanctuary in the center. There were three tribes to a side. All the tribes under the leadership of Judah increased, whereas all those under Reuben's leadership had decreased. The Judah clan was coming to the fore in its predestined leadership, and Reuben was fading.

This census was the beginning of the preparation of the second generation for the conquest and occupation of Canaan. They would soon be tested, and, in Deuteronomy, we have a summation, with some expansions, of God's law, to ready them for dominion.

The military census reminded all the adult males of the coming war. No culture can survive which does not defend itself, and no culture lasts long if it is not missionary minded, if it does not believe that its culture is worth extending to other peoples. Neither can a culture survive if it does not recognize that some practices cannot coexist with a living culture. The radical tolerance of our time for every form of evil, i.e., for pornography, abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, and more, is not a mark of nobility but of decadence. Both history and societies exact death penalties; the question is, where will societies apply the death penalty, against religion and morality, or against evils?

Death marks history, because history is the record of fallen man's struggle against God, and his search for total independence from God. Except for death, the result of sin, man would go on forever defying God and attempting to create his Towers of Babel, his humanistic world orders, in opposition to God.

For the godly, the time and death factor is an incentive to do what we must do without delay. Even our Lord declared, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work" (John 9:4).

The census thus was a preparation for action. It alerted the men of military age to the necessity of battle.

Chapter Forty-Nine

The Law of Inheritance

(Numbers 27:1-11)

1. Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph: and these are the names of his daughters; Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah.
2. And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,
3. Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but died in his own sin, and had no sons.
4. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.
5. And Moses brought their cause before the LORD.
6. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
7. The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.
8. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.
9. And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren.
10. And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren.
11. And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses. (Numbers 27:1-11)

The Bible is a land-based and property oriented religion. As a result, the laws of inheritance are very important in the Bible. The interference of the state into inheritance by controls and taxes is anti- Christian. The premise that "the earth is the LORD's" is basic to the Bible and its law. We meet with it in Exodus 9:29; it is the reason why God moved against Pharaoh. It is basic to God's law, as we see in Deuteronomy 10:14. Psalm 24:1 celebrates it. Because "the earth is the LORD's," He governs the laws of inheritance.

Historically, the oldest son has been the heir. In England, although never made a law, the English nobility have followed this practice rigidly, often to their detriment. This rule made some sense in earlier centuries when the vocation of the nobility and of kings was battle, and, as a result, they had the lowest and shortest life expectancy of any group in Europe. A nobleman married very early in order to produce an heir to fight to retain the family's realm.

In the Bible, however, we see a different standard. *First*, the order of inheritance is the order of faith and character. Abraham's heir was not Ishmael but Isaac; Isaac's heir was not Esau but Jacob; Jacob's heir was not Reuben but Judah, his fourth-born. The godly seed was favored then, and in godly eras since then, in order to capitalize Christ's Kingdom, His people. To capitalize an ungodly son, or a godly but foolish son, was and is to do harm to the future under God. As a result, the law of inheritance is important to the Bible.

Second, we must think beyond the immediate. We are told, "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children" (Proverbs 13:22). Short-term thinking is regarded as ungodly. God's Kingdom extends throughout all of history and into eternity. We cannot limit our thinking and planning to our lifetime. God, who created time and this world, requires us to live in time and in the realities of the world. It is ungodly to be a striver for a spirituality which is unrelated to this world.

Third, the Bible affords especial protection and security to women in a godly society. Apart from this law of inheritance, a woman had another major financial security, the dowry. The dowry of virgins is cited in Exodus 22:16-17. If a man seduced a virgin, he was required by law to pay her a full dowry whether or not her father accepted him as a husband to his daughter. This dowry was not specified, but it was normally equivalent to three years' wages. Because Jacob was taking Rachel far from her father's close protection, he specified a dowry of seven years' wages (Genesis 29:18). This dowry was her protection money against abuse or desertion and an inheritance for her children. This dowry system ensured the wife's security and the stability of the family. A man did not readily wrong a wife who held so much family capital, three years' wages normally, in gold or silver.

Fourth, the clear implication of Biblical law and practice was that faith and character took priority over sex on occasion. In Joshua 15:16-19 and Judges 1:12-15, we see that Caleb not only made his daughter Achsah his main heir, but also granted her even more when she requested it. Caleb obviously saw more strength of faith and character in his daughter than in any male in his family. Very clearly, the position of a daughter was a strong one. Because the family is God's basic institution on earth, the woman is given particular protection. The patriarchal character of the Biblical family was only possible because of the moral requirements imposed on men and the protection and security given to godly women. The term "dowry" survived in American law as "the right of a widow in respect of the property of her deceased husband."¹⁶⁷ In fact, according to Clark,

But though the law contemplated that the property of a dead husband and father should go to his sons, or to his daughters or brethren or kinsman, it may not be supposed that his widow was to be "neglected" or "sent away empty." To the contrary, it seems that she always had a right of dower — that the property was chargeable for her sustenance and the rearing and education of the young children if there were any, and that she was entitled to a house in which to live. Even under ancient Babylonian law, long before the time of Abraham, a wife was entitled to receive her dowry and either a gift from her husband or the portion of a son, and also to dwell in the house of her husband as long as she lived. Dower has likewise been an institution of the English law since early Anglo-Saxon times, and of

American as well. Indeed it has been said of this right that it is as “widespread as the Christian religion and enters into the contract of marriage among all Christians.”¹⁶⁸

This was written before the end of World War II; the law since has not been improved. In early America, the absence of a property tax made a woman’s status very secure. Now the widow faces Internal Revenue taxes, state taxes, death taxes, and more.

Fifth, it is especially important to note that Moses looked to God for a revelation (v. 5) and received it. The matter of inheritance was too important for Moses to act on inferences or personal opinions. The central institution, the family, was at stake. The family and its future could be entrusted to a woman, a daughter. I have heard of instances, prior to World War I, where such situations meant that the daughter, on marrying, bore her father’s name; in many instances, especially if her husband came from a good family, the two surnames were both used and hyphenated, as, for example, Smith-Williams. For other reasons as well, this practice is still common in England. The idea was that neither family line was allowed to die out.

Sixth, the daughters did not make undue claims about their father. He had not joined Korah and other leaders in their hostility to the Lord and Moses but “died in his own sin.” This apparently had reference to Zelophehad’s support of the false spies (Numbers 13-14; 26:64-65). There could be disinheritance for some sins, such as blasphemy. Centuries later, Jezebel used such a fraudulent charge to seize Naboth’s vineyard and disinherit his line, in return for which God cut off Ahab’s family (1 Kings 21:7ff). Nebuchadnezzar, on seeing God’s vindication of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, issued an order decreeing the end of any family guilty of blasphemy against their God (Daniel 3:29), the God of the Hebrews.

Seventh, by confirming the daughters in their inheritance, God made it clear that He was concerned with *families*, not merely the heads of families.¹⁶⁹ In v. 11, it is plainly stated that this decision is henceforth a part of God’s law.

Eighth, nothing in this law of inheritance sets aside a woman’s dowry right. This is an important fact. Feminism attacks the Bible because it makes clear man’s headship in the family, but it refuses to acknowledge the protection given to women. Here, an heiress receiving title to her father’s estate, or, by implication, the double portion as against a foolish son, receives also a dowry from her husband and is thus further enriched and protected.

Then, *ninth*, it is the father’s name which is perpetuated, although the woman or women become heir to the estate (v. 4). No amount of wealth accumulating to the wife can be used to erase the fact that the family name is derived from the man.

Tenth, what was at stake was title to a portion of land. The Bible is a land-based book. It sees the family and land as basic to godly order. The modern state works against God by legislating against the family and its land by taxes and controls.

Eleventh, an order of inheritance is laid down in vv. 9-11: (1) sons and their descendants; (2) daughters and their descendants; (3) the brothers of the father; and (4) the kinsman next in line in

the father's family. As in the law of the levirate, the name of the deceased man was assumed (Deut. 25:5-6).

Twelfth, Calvin called attention to the fact that the daughters of Zelophehad pleaded "for their own private advantage," but this by no means made their pleading wrong. It is an error to assume that private advantage means public wrong. They were looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promises, and they acted in faith.¹⁷⁰

Then, *thirteenth*, we find an interesting application of this law in the Book of Ruth. The property at stake belonged to Elimelech, Naomi's husband. Naomi was not of Elimelech's blood line, nor was Ruth, her daughter-in-law. All the same, the property, when redeemed, went to Naomi and to Ruth, who was not even a Hebrew. This is an amazing fact. It tells us the degree to which marriage in God's sight makes a couple one flesh: Elimelech's property right was Naomi's, and their son Chilion's property right became Ruth's.

Fourteenth, we come to another startling fact, best summed up by N. H. Snaith:

Normally the heir receives two portions (Dt. 21:17), but here the five daughters are represented as all being heirs, and so we get the five daughters receiving 'ten portions'. From a strict point of view this makes little sense, but it makes no sense at all any other way.¹⁷¹

Each daughter would be treated as the main heir in the division of Canaan.

In Numbers 36, we again meet with the daughters of Zelophehad. The issue is a different one, as we shall see: namely, how the family is reckoned if a woman heiress marries outside of her clan.

What is clear is that patriarchal society, because it was family centered, gave better status and treatment to women than any other culture. The feminist rage against patriarchy is both ignorant and wrong. Patriarchy requires strong men and strong women; modern culture produces neither.

Chapter Fifty
Leadership Succession
(Numbers 27:12-23)

12. And the LORD said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel.
13. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered.
14. For ye rebelled against my commandment in the desert of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify me at the water before their eyes: that is the water of Meribah in Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.
15. And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying,
16. Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,
17. Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd.
18. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;
19. And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.
20. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient.
21. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.
22. And Moses did as the LORD commanded him: and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation:
23. And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses. (Numbers 27:12- 23)

At the beginning, it is well at this point to call attention to an obvious fact of Biblical literature, namely, its detailed and repetitive character, as in v. 21: “at his word shall they go out, and at his word shall they come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” Scholars call this the Hebraic style, and this merely gives it a name: it is no explanation. The answer is that it is specific and repetitive because it is legal language. All the Bible, from beginning to end, is God’s law-word, and it has the character of legal language over the ages, specific, detailed, and repetitive.

The judgment on Moses is the saddest part of this book. We can with justice say that it was in part merciful, in that Moses was spared the problems of the conquest, and this is certainly true. All the same, it meant that Moses would not be present at the climax of all his labors.

Moses had been guilty of anger and despair at a point where God's grace and miraculous power were being made manifest. He had limited his vision to the facts before him instead of seeing all things in terms of God's supernatural and total power. He had given too much weight to the sin of the people and too little to the power of God.

This was serious, because Moses was the leader of God's clerisy. At all times, his vision had to be governed, not by the evils of the human scene before him, but by the power and the promises of God.

In a Christian sense, we must echo the poet's words, "The world is too much with us," a disastrous fact. We must not cloud our vision by seeing only what this world is and does. To do so is to ignore God and His world. There is always more to history than we see. The Book of Esther never once mentions the name of God; it goes out of its way to *avoid* doing so even as it shows the marvelous predestinating providence of God working behind, in, over, and beneath all things to make all things work together for good in terms of His sovereign purpose (Romans 8:28).

Joseph Parker made a telling point with regard to this text. He observed that here God "offends us morally."¹⁷² We want, he pointed out, a happy finish here and now. Our vision is time-bound, whereas God sees from eternity to eternity, and Moses had an eternal reward awaiting him.

Moses's death would be on top of Mount Abarim or Nebo (Deut. 34:1), the modern Nebo. However, before the actual time of death and the subsequent invasion of Canaan, there was an interim of some time wherein Moses (in Deuteronomy) reviewed the law, including key additions to it. Deuteronomy's discourses were given to the families and to the children for their instruction.

His instruction was in God's law, and its universal application. Abraham Kuenin (1828-1891), a very skeptical scholar, observed that there are only three religions with a universal faith, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism. All others are partial in scope and limited in their application. Some would restrict this catholicity to Christianity, but it is noteworthy that all three in some degree recognize the Biblical revelation, and only Christianity does so fully. Without Biblical faith, men and religions have both a false and a limited perspective and future.

This is not all. Biblical faith makes a man's life and death significant. This is most true of Old Testament Judaism and especially Christianity. In Scripture, a deathbed benediction and instruction is very important. Until recently, it was regarded as a sad event to die suddenly without the opportunity to gather round all one's descendents, to instruct and bless them.

We now have a reverse situation because of the prevalence of humanism. A very important figure in avant-garde art was Marcel Duchamp. He was at the least a transvestite, going under the name Rose Selavy (c'est la vie?), possibly a homosexual. His life was dedicated to the death of meaning; the goal of his art was that it should be a realm of non-understanding.¹⁷³ Duchamp opposed the idea of law.¹⁷⁴ He was against "interpretation" as futile. Duchamp liked machines "because they had no taste and no feelings." Machines are also anonymous. He insisted that there are no problems, because "problems are inventions of the mind," and he was against the mind

and meaning. We are told that he thundered against “retinal” or focused and realistic painting, because it was governed by the eye, and “the eye needs to think, to unify, to be intelligent.” While he loved the machine, he was against what he called “bad sciences,” which are “exact” and which “operate according to order and measure.”¹⁷⁵ Duchamp was the modern mind developed to the full in its humanism. It has no regard for life, death, or the future.

What marks Moses from this point on is his zealous concern to prepare all the people, and us, and all mankind to the end of time, for their responsibilities to the past, present, and future. He prepares all who will listen, and he ordains Joshua as his God-given successor. He lays his hands on Joshua. The Hebrew uses different words for the laying on of hands in blessing, and the laying on of hands to transfer guilt to a sacrificial animal, or to commission a successor.¹⁷⁶

There is no self-pity whatsoever in Moses. His one concern is the future of God’s Kingdom. The greatness of Moses is very apparent here. A man reared as a prince of Egypt, he had become an outlaw for his people’s sake, then their deliverer and leader whom they did not appreciate, and now he faced death with serenity. His prayer in vv. 16-17 is for a godly successor. What was now needed was a military leader who was also a man of God, and this was Joshua. This has been called the first example of what was later called apostolic succession, but this was one ordered by God, not by man. This succession was neither by blood relationship, as with kings, nor by election, as with churches. It was entirely God’s ordering. Thus, while a parallel is clear, an identification of the two kinds of succession would be false.

In v. 17, the true leader and successor is described as one who goes out before them, i.e., he leads the way. He is a trailblazer, not a follower. What we have today is a singular lack of leadership, because officials are governed by polls, by the media, and by intellectuals who believe that wisdom was born with them and may well die when they do (Job 12:2). The result is dereliction, not advancement.

The *form* of government cannot overcome this problem. It is faith and character which alone supply the necessary ingredient for leadership. The current emphasis on elections as the key to the salvation of the body politic is absurd: would the Mafia, or any criminal league, be improved by elections? Elections are *not* of themselves an evil: far from it. But the modern temper, from the days of the defenders of the divine right of kings to the present belief in some kind of divine right of democracy, is absurd, if not evil, as have been the “remedies” of fascism, national or international socialism, dictatorships, or anything else. *Rule* and *authority* are moral facts. They cannot be gained by any formal polity, whether in church or state. Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, and congregationalism are alike politics highly productive of great evils when separated from God’s law-word and practiced by men lacking faith and character.

Not surprisingly, in our time as in other like decadent eras, there is an absence of good leadership in church and state because *the people will not have it*. Israel only had it at this point because God provided it. Not surprisingly, as the Book of Judges makes clear, on their own the people were quickly enslaved. The chosen people demonstrated that, apart from God’s grace, they were worthless; their existence was simply all of grace.

Chapter Fifty-One

Public Sacrifices

(Numbers 28:1-8)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, My offering, and my bread for my sacrifices made by fire, for a sweet savour unto me, shall ye observe to offer unto me in their due season.
3. And thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, for a continual burnt offering.
4. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even;
5. And a tenth part of an ephah of flour for a meat offering, mingled with the fourth part of an hin of beaten oil.
6. It is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained in mount Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.
7. And the drink offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the LORD for a drink offering.
8. And the other lamb shalt thou offer at even: as the meat offering of the morning, and as the drink offering thereof, thou shalt offer it, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. (Numbers 28:1-8)

In this chapter, the public offerings are cited, and also in chapter 29. In Numbers 28:1-8, we have the required daily offerings; vv. 9- 10, the Sabbath offerings; in vv. 11-15, the New Moon or monthly offerings; in vv. 16-25, the unleavened cakes; the weeks of firstfruits, vv. 26-31, for the beginning of the civil year, 29:1-6; for the Day of Atonement, 29:7-11; and for the autumn feast of booths, 29:12-38.

The immediate impression is one of being overwhelmed by the number of animals sacrificed. There is a reason for these sacrifices. *First*, cheap grace is a modern heresy. God requires much of us because He gives so much, our creation, care, and eternal destiny. All that we are comes from Him. We are therefore required to give Him what He requires. As we have seen (in Leviticus), the animals sacrificed had to be animals that cost man something. While deer and most fish were clean animals, they could not be offered up as sacrifices because they did not cost man something. The sacrifice had to involve man's work. *Second*, many of the sacrificial animals provided for the support of God's priests and Levites. We would say, in modern terms, that God's clergy and clerisy must be amply provided for, or there is no progress in His Kingdom. *Third*, in Leviticus, the requirement of the laymen to give is stressed. In Numbers, the duty of the priests to sacrifice is the focus, and, therefore, by implication, the duty to teach the necessity for the support of the Lord's work.

Fourth, these morning and evening sacrifices were connected with morning and evening prayer in Psalms 50, 59, and 88, and especially in Psalm 141:1-2:

1. LORD, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee.
2. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

The morning and evening prayers of many churches, Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Episcopal, have their origin in these sacrifices, one in the morning, and another in the evening.

Fifth, there is another very important aspect to these sacrifices: they are in terms of a *religious* calendar, in terms of God's timing. Men in antiquity had a statist calendar, and the French and Russian revolutions both attempted to create new calendars. Now we see an attempt to alter and drop B.C. and A.D., to end dating in terms of Jesus Christ. A humanistic calendar is the goal. The very word "Christmas" is being dropped; city decorations read "Happy Holidays," not "Merry Christmas."

Sixth, these sacrifices were not man-willed but God-ordained. Men would be happy to forget God if He did not require regular worship, and tithes and offerings. God's ordination puts man's life on a schedule and under requirement. This is necessary for our moral and spiritual health. The Christian year has receded, and the man-willed times and seasons now govern us. God calls these various sacrifices "My offering" (v. 2): they are His due and His property. The drink offering was poured out at the foot of the altar.

Seventh, the reminder in chapters 28-29 of these necessary sacrifices follows the order for the soon forthcoming change in leadership. The generations come and go, but God remains, and none can alter His requirements save He alone. The departure of Moses from leadership and life made no difference in what God required. God's Promised Land and His blessings were only to be had on His terms, faithfulness. As Ronald B. Allen points out, this was not the law of Moses but the law of God, and none could assume that, with the death of Moses, anything changed.¹⁷⁷

Eighth, God requires or calls attention to certain facts in these sacrifices. There is an "appointed time" for them (v. 2), a rhythm of worship. There is also the concept of "the acceptable gift," and the acceptable gift is what God requires. Then there is the fact that God, not man, must be pleased. Obedience, God says, is "a sweet savour unto me" (vv. 2, 6).¹⁷⁸ What this means Keil and Delitzsch stated clearly:

In the daily burnt-offering the congregation of Israel, as a congregation of Jehovah, was to sanctify its life, body, soul, and spirit, to the Lord its God; and on the Lord's feast-days it was to give expression to this sanctification in an intensified form.¹⁷⁹

Ninth, we need to give particular attention to a fact already cited, namely, that God calls whatever is brought "My sacrifice" (v. 2). Gossen in Lange's commentary observed of these words,

My Sacrifice — It belongs to the LORD already. We offer not our own — but what is His. We receive first and then give of what we have received. “The offering, the power and will to offer, the offerer himself, all belong to God.” God receives His own again, but with it the affection, the homage, and the devotion of the offerers. The showers that bless the earth bear back with them its fragrance.¹⁸⁰

Tenth, there is a very important aspect to these sacrifices which was mentioned briefly at the beginning. They are *public offerings*, for all the people. In the modern era, Christianity has been steadily reduced and restricted to the personal sphere and removed from the public domain. This view when first proposed within the church by the Sandemanians was dealt with as a heresy; the state and every other sphere of life has an equal duty to be under God. What was once regarded as a heresy is now an accepted belief, with devastating consequences, because it reduces Christianity from a universal or catholic faith to a cult, whose concerns are limited to a narrow sphere.

Then, *eleventh*, we must recognize that for the Bible there is no worship without sacrifice. Christians are seriously in error if they believe that Christ’s atoning sacrifice abolishes this fact. There are no more sacrifices of atonement, but Paul, in Romans 12:1, makes it clear how much more we must now sacrifice:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

This stress is common to the Old Testament (i.e., Psalm 51:16-17) and is underscored in the New. Our lives belong to God, and we are to *present* ourselves to Him continually as a living sacrifice.

Twelfth, public sacrifice and worship are necessary due to the fact that there is a disturbed and damaged relationship between God and man. Sacrifice and worship have a restorative purpose. We acknowledge our readiness to go astray; we confess our sins and shortcomings; and we work to understand God’s word and purposes better.

The *necessity* for these offerings rests on the fact of the covenant. Although God’s covenant of law with man is a covenant of grace, because He is so far greater than all His creation, it is also a covenant of law, because all covenants are law treaties. The fact that God in His grace gives us His law, makes us His people, and protects us in His mercy, makes all the more mandatory a response of gratitude and obedience. Our giving is a response to His covenantal blessings and care. The offertory response written by Bishop W. Walsham How in 1864 sums it up beautifully:

We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate’er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

Public sacrifices are here required so that the covenant people may recognize the need for continual gratitude and thanksgiving, and the necessity for obedience.

Chapter Fifty-Two

Sabbaths, Time, and Focus

(*Numbers 28:9-15*)

9. And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and the drink offering thereof:
10. This is the burnt offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.
11. And in the beginnings of your months ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD; two young bullocks, and one ram, seven lambs of the first year without spot;
12. And three tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, for one bullock; and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, for one ram;
13. And a several tenth deal of flour mingled with oil for a meat offering unto one lamb; for a burnt offering of a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.
14. And their drink offerings shall be half an hin of wine unto a bullock, and the third part of an hin unto a ram, and a fourth part of an hin unto a lamb: this is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year.
15. And one kid of the goats for a sin offering unto the LORD shall be offered, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering. (*Numbers 28:9-15*)

We come again to familiar material, restated in terms of a different and public perspective. Burnt offerings are those wholly consumed on the altar, although at times such offerings are called *whole burnt offerings*, since all such sacrifices were in part burnt offerings. “Meat” offerings we would call *meal* offerings. “Two tenth deals of flour” Moffatt renders as fourteen pints, and “three tenth deals” as twentyone pints (vv. 9, 12). “Half an hin of wine” (v. 14) he gives as six pints.

The offerings cited here are of two kinds insofar as their purposes are concerned. *First*, there are the Sabbath offerings in vv. 9-10; *second*, in vv. 13-15, we have the new moon offerings, on the first day of each month. We have a reference to this observance in Isaiah 1:13, where God condemns Judah for hypocritical and purely formal observances. In Amos 8:5 the prophet condemns the people because they can hardly wait for the new moon Sabbaths to end to get back to their corrupt business:

4. Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy even to make the poor of the land to fail,
5. Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? (*Amos 8:4-5*)

Now the purpose of these public Sabbaths is to take man’s mind off himself and his concerns and to center them on God. Amos says that the people instead spent their time fretting, and they

viewed the Sabbath as a restraint on their money-making rather than as a rest. In Hosea 2:11-13, God promises that He Himself will put an end to their new moon Sabbaths by bringing judgment upon them instead of rest, because they are an apostate people. In 1 Samuel 20:5-6 it appears that the new moon Sabbaths were times for family or clan meals together, with retainers included. Ezekiel 46:3, 6-7 calls for a revival of new moon Sabbaths.

In Isaiah 56:1-8, there is a remarkable reference to the observance of the Sabbaths, a reference inclusive of the weekly, the monthly, and the seventh year rests:

1. Thus saith the LORD, keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.
2. Blessed is the man, that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.
3. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold I am a dry tree.
4. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant;
5. Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.
6. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant;
7. Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.
8. The Lord GOD which gathered the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him.

What we have here is not modern sabbatarianism. It is tied to God's covenant and therefore to His law. Its goal is the *full* observance of the Sabbath, weekly, monthly, and every seventh year; it means freedom from long term debt and for God-centered living. God promises great blessings to all who "take hold" of, or, "hold fast" to, His covenant (v. 4). In the words of Amos 8:4-5, we have a condemnation of a purely formal obedience, whereas in Isaiah 56:1- 8, God declares that He will bless those who obey His Sabbaths in all their ways.

According to Walter Riggans,

A Rabbinic treatise on Exod. 31:14 comments: "Furthermore, whoever keeps the Sabbath testifies of him at whose word the world came into being, that he created the world in six days and rested on the seventh."¹⁸¹

We are required to view both ourselves and time under the light of God's word; we are His creation, and so, too, is time. Men have always had forms of reckoning time, and the most

common has been a statist calendar and perspective. When current politicians talk about a new world order, they are viewing time and the future as a human product, or at the least as something to be shaped and given form by man and society. The true purpose of all Sabbaths is to teach us that God is the Lord. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, and it is a great commentary on time. Moses sees time as totally God's instrument, whether it be man's life span or the world and its course, and he prays, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12). We are to see all things as God's work, and so, Moses concludes,

16. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.

17. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. (Psalm 90:16-17)

His prayer that "the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us" is a request that His magnificence, His loving favor, and the glory of His grace be upon us and understood in some degree by us. We are to see time, not as a burden, but as an opportunity from God.

Irving L. Jensen said of the burnt offering, that it "symbolically represented the yielding of the person to God."¹⁸² Here, as a public sacrifice, it signifies that not only as individuals, but also as a nation do we yield ourselves to God by acknowledging His sovereignty in creation and over time. We must learn to say with David, "My times are in thy hand" (Psalm 31:15). Everything in our culture works to give a man-centered view of time, whether the perspective be personal or national, work-oriented or play-centered. The Sabbath is profaned if we fail to recognize time as God-centered and God-governed.

We can understand something of the sad dereliction of Phariseeism in the comment of Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz on the new moon Sabbaths. The monthly rebirth of the moon he sees as symbolic of Israel's rebirth as well. "Not only do they atone for themselves through the sin offering of Rosh Chodesh, but in a sense, they also atone for God, Who sent them into exile thereby causing the desecration of God's Name."¹⁸³

The new moon sabbaths had been ordered earlier, together with the blowing of trumpets. Here the sacrifices of this observance are specified. In Deuteronomy 17:2-5, God strictly forbids the worship of the moon and other aspects of nature; the purpose of this Sabbath is again to mark time as God's time. Israel's calendar was and is (among the orthodox) a lunar calendar of twelve months of thirty days, with the remaining days constituting special Sabbaths, apparently.

Sabbaths are quite properly recognized as days of rest. This is their God-ordained purpose. God not only does not require continuous work but He also condemns it as a violation of His law. Here we see another aspect of God's purpose regarding the Sabbath. It is a time for focus. The men whom Amos condemned outwardly kept the Sabbath, but their lives' focus was on evil; they were lawless men, despite their formal observance of a day of rest. They failed to recognize the meaning of God's covenant, of which the Sabbath is a witness. God's covenant requires that the totality of our lives be governed by His covenant law and lived in the light of His mercy. This is the required focus. This is the reason for the Sabbath: we rest from ourselves and our way of life to refocus our lives on God and His law-word; we look to His Spirit to govern our spirit, to His

word to silence our foolish words, and to His providential care. Our lives are not our own, and we need the requirement of the Sabbath to remind us of that fact.

Modern man is destroying his ability to work by abandoning the true Sabbath. His life now has no focus except his own wishes, and, because, as a fallen man, his wishes are self-centered, he increasingly loses hold on reality. Reality is God-centered; the self-centered man loses touch with it.

Chapter Fifty-Three

The Religious Calendar

(Numbers 28:16-31)

16. And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the LORD.
17. And in the fifteenth day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.
18. In the first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work therein:
19. But ye shall offer a sacrifice made by fire for a burnt offering unto the LORD; two young bullocks, and one ram, and seven lambs of the first year: they shall be unto you without blemish:
20. And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil: three tenth deals shall ye offer for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram;
21. A several tenth deal shalt thou offer for every lamb, throughout the seven lambs:
22. And one goat for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you.
23. Ye shall offer these beside the burnt offering in the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering.
24. After this manner ye shall offer daily, throughout the seven days, the meat of the sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: it shall be offered beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.
25. And on the seventh day ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work.
26. Also in the day of the firstfruits, when ye bring a new meat offering unto the LORD, after your weeks be out, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work:
27. But ye shall offer the burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; two young bullocks, one ram, seven lambs of the first year;
28. And their meat offering of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto one bullock, two tenth deals unto one ram,
29. A several tenth deal unto one lamb, throughout the seven lambs;
30. And one kid of the goats, to make an atonement for you.
31. Ye shall offer them beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, (they shall be unto you without blemish) and their drink offerings. (Numbers 28:16-31)

In these verses, vv. 16-25 are concerned with the Passover, and vv. 26-31, with the day of firstfruits, or feast of harvest, for which our modern name is Thanksgiving. In state schools today, the explanation for Thanksgiving is paganized. Supposedly the Indians taught the first settlers to celebrate mother earth's bounty. This kind of misrepresentation is increasingly common and deliberate. When men forsake God, they forsake all truth, because for them there is no difference between good and evil, nor between truth and lies.

There is a relationship between these two holy days, the Passover and the harvest feast. Both have to do with gratitude and the giving of thanks. Passover, or now holy communion, means giving thanks to God for His sovereign grace in our salvation, and the day of firstfruits, or the harvest feast, celebrates God's goodness to us in the earth's bounty to us.

Passover began with the feast of unleavened bread, although technically the feast of unleavened bread followed it, the one on the fourteenth day of the first month, the other, unleavened bread, on the fifteenth; for seven days, unleavened bread was eaten. However, the feast of unleavened bread marked the beginning of seven weeks of celebration, God's grace and mercy being stressed for a week of weeks according to Deuteronomy 16:9. Passover and the feast of unleavened bread are virtually identical in Mark 14:1, 12, and especially in Luke 22:1, where we are told, "the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover." Because of our salvation, the Passover, the joy of harvest followed for seven weeks.

Now the Passover was a sacramental feast. St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 explains its meaning, as well as that of unleavened bread:

7. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:
8. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

To purge out the old leaven meant a break with the old life. The leaven of Egypt had to be left behind to signify a break with their past, and that they were now a new people. It is the "old leaven" which is eliminated, for they are now a new people. The Passover is a dividing line, as is Christ's cross and atonement for us. We are now a new creation. The feast celebrates the fact of our new creation and our eternal life in Christ. Charles Hodge wrote,

A feast was a portion of time consecrated to God. To *keep the feast* means, "Let your whole lives be as a sacred festival, i.e. consecrated to God."¹⁸⁴

The Passover (and communion) is to be kept "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." We are purged of the old man; we break with our Egypt, and "the old leaven" is left behind. As Hodge pointed out,

Sincerity is *purity*, transparent clearness; something through which the sun may shine without revealing any flaw. *Truth* is in scripture far more than veracity. In its subjective sense, it means that inward state which answers to the truth; that moral condition which is conformed to the law and character of God.¹⁸⁵

There is a grim fact about the feast of weeks, or firstfruits, or harvest, as it is variously known. It could not be observed during the Babylonian captivity, nor after the fall of Jerusalem, A.D. 66-70, because there was no harvest to celebrate. When we depart from God, then in time God separates from us any harvest to celebrate. This is a fact which Israel then and now has forgotten to take note of.

The year was marked by a sacred calendar. Time, coming from God, was celebrated in terms of His works of redemption and blessing. The Christian calendar has had a similar character. Since World War II in particular, the calendar has been secularized and paganized steadily. To do so is to incur the wrath of God. Numbers 28 and 29 have as their purpose to stress the importance of a sacred calendar.

Both the calendar and God's covenant law rest on the fact of the atonement. Apart from the atonement, man is lawless: he is anti- God and is an enemy to God's law. To despise God's law is to despise His atonement, because the atonement satisfies God's law and redeems us to live in holiness, in God's law as our way of life. Communion and harvest rest on Christ's atonement.

In one way or another, the basic holy days that were festivals were all connected with farming or ranching. Israel was required to remember that these things went together with the blessing of *land*. Biblical religion is land oriented. As a slave people, while possessing an area to live in, Goshen, Israel was not free, since its labor *and* harvests were taxed. In terms of God's law, a tax on land, or on its produce, is a lawless act, since "the earth is the LORD'S and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). *To tax what God gives to make life possible is a tax against life*. The tithes and offerings required by God are because He is our great Landlord, and the author of all life and blessings. As Matthew Henry observed, "When God sows plentifully upon us He expects to reap accordingly from us."¹⁸⁶

God must be recognized as the source of all life and blessings, and therefore as our sovereign and Lord. As Oehler wrote:

In virtue of the principles of the theocracy, *all* the powers of the state are united in *Jehovah*; even when the congregation acts, it is in His name. He is first the *Lawgiver*, (Isa. xxxiii. 22). His legislative power He exercised *through Moses*. The fundamental law given through him is inviolably valid for all time. As God's covenant with His people is eternal, so also are the covenant ordinances; they are, as the expression frequently runs, everlasting laws and statutes for Israel and the future generations (see Ex. xii. 14, 17; xxvii. 21; xxviii. 43, and many passages). The Pentateuch knows nothing of a future change in the law, nor of an abrogation of it even in part; *only the attitude of the people toward the law* was to be different in the last times.¹⁸⁷

As we have seen, the religious calendar, and the season of joy, began with the combined feasts of Passover and of unleavened bread. Passover signifies the fact of new life and redemption, while the feast of unleavened bread commemorates a break with our old life. Together, these feasts declare that we are now citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of Christ in His new creation.

The calendar, with these two festivals, celebrates *a break with the past*. This is the meaning also of the sacraments: a break with the past, a baptism into a new life, and communion with Christ and with one another as members of a new community.

Just as there is a discontinuity between God and creation, since the one is uncreated Being, and the other created being, so, too, there is a break in history between the unredeemed and the redeemed. For the redeemed, there is a break with their fallen past, but a break in which God uses our past, for “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). For the Christian, time always has a meaning far greater than himself, humanity, and the cosmos.

All life means change and movement, growing stronger, or growing weaker, and we move either towards the fullness of life in Christ, or we plunge towards death and hell. There is no standing still in time: we cannot arrest time unto an unending, unchanging moment. The calendar of our lives either moves in terms of God’s clock and life, or into death and hell.

Chapter Fifty-Four

The Feast of Trumpets

(*Numbers 29:1-6*)

1. And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you.
 2. And ye shall offer a burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year without blemish:
 3. And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram,
 4. And one tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs:
 5. And one kid of the goats for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you:
 6. Beside the burnt offering of the month, and his meat offering, and the daily burnt offering, and his meat offering, and their drink offerings, according unto their manner, for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD.
- (Numbers 29:1-6)

We come now, once again, to the feast of trumpets, the celebration at the beginning of each new month. This was, *first*, a celebration of time, of God's time; each new month was an opportunity for a fuller life in the Lord. Although ours is a fallen world, the passage of time means the advancement of God's Kingdom and His holy purpose. We may not see the movement of time as God does, but we must recognize that He ordains and governs all of time.

Second, it was a day for special sacrifices, public sacrifices. The text spells out what these were. There was to be a holy convocation or gathering, and no servile work. While not the same as the regular Sabbaths, it was in a way a Sabbath also. Add this and other festive days on the calendar to fifty-two Sabbaths, to the seventh year Sabbath, and to the jubilee, and it becomes apparent that a great deal of time was spent in rest and celebration. Medieval life reproduced this in its own way with holy days for saints. How was this possible? In a society without a land tax or an income tax, man did not work most of his days to pay the tax collector, or the bank. Today, new home buyers may pay out \$1,500 a month on their house mortgage, with only \$50 to \$100 going towards the principal. Neither psychological nor physical, let alone spiritual, rest is then possible. Statism and debt living are the oppressors of modern man, and he has neither peace nor rest.

Third, the day began with the blowing of trumpets. The blowing of trumpets in the Old Testament has several meanings: to mark time, to summon men to battle, and to declare that the people of God must move ahead, because God is moving forward. On the feast of trumpets, all these meanings are apparently in view. We begin the new month, we mark time, in the faith that we are moving forward because God has so ordained it. Because God's purposes move forward, we are the gainers by following, no matter what the difficulties.

In Numbers 10:10, we are told that we celebrate time because the Lord is our God. The required offerings are specified here and in Numbers 28:11-15.

The trumpet is a summons also to victory. In the New Testament, we hear of the final or Last Trumpet sounding the end of our battle and the great victory (Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). In Revelation 8:2, the blowing of trumpets signals judgment upon the evil world around us, and in Revelation 10:7, it sounds the conclusion of that judgment, as it does in Revelation 11:15:

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying,
The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God, and of his
Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

All through the Bible, the first represents the totality, so that the celebration of the first day of the month means the celebration of all time. The prayer in the Temple was, “Blessed be He that reneweth the months.” Later, the synagogue prayers thanked God for creation, for the hope of the Messiah, and for His glorious Kingdom.¹⁸⁸

Our text, however, here calls attention to a *particular* feast of trumpets, or blowing of trumpets for the new moon or month. It was, as v. 1 makes clear, to be done in particular, with the specified sacrifices, *in the seventh month*. In this month, there was a penitential season for ten days, followed by the day of atonement. Extra sacrifices were thus required. Four main kinds are specified in vv. 1-7: the burnt offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, and the peace offering.

First, the burnt offering was common to both public and private sacrifices. The whole sacrifice was consumed upon the altar. The worshipper had to lay his hands on the animal to identify himself with it as one to be wholly given up to God.

The sin offering was for specific offenses or uncleanness, and it was again common to public and private worship (Lev. 5:2ff.; 15; Num. 28-29).

The guilt offering was not part of the usual sacrifices. It referred to serious and specific offenses such as sacrilege, adultery with a slave girl, or breaking a Nazarite vow (Lev. 5:14-6:7, 19:20-22; Num. 6:9-12). Healed lepers also offered the guilt offering (Lev. 14:12; cf. 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chron. 26:19-20).

The peace offering was required also for the feast of weeks or Pentecost (Lev. 23:19). The layman here shared the meat. People could offer peace offerings at any time to rejoice before the Lord.¹⁸⁹

According to Maarsingh, the term “a day of blowing of trumpets” (v. 1) can also be translated “a day of shoutings shall it be for you,” and there is evidence, not only for the trumpets but also for the shouting, or happy acclamation.¹⁹⁰ This helps to emphasize that the passage of time was a cause for joy, because God’s purpose for us is accomplished in time. When Paul, on one occasion, in Lystra, after performing a miracle, was stoned, dragged out of the city as a dead man, and tossed aside, he arose and returned to teach there and elsewhere, “that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). This same Paul, after many tribulations, could still declare, “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4).

This seventh month of the Hebrew calendar includes parts of our September and October. In Numbers 28:11-15, we have the usual offerings for the new moon feasts; here we have added one young bull, one ram, and seven yearling male rams, because of the celebrations which follow. Because the seventh month fell between the time of harvest and the time of sowing for the winter to spring plantings, it was also the season for more festivals than at any other time of the Hebrew calendar; this was the month Tisri. It was the “religious” month in that attention was called to central aspects of faith and life.

There is another aspect to the blowing of the trumpets to mark time. We are familiar with the formal uses of trumpets in history to herald royalty, to proclaim victory, or to announce something of great importance. This is clearly the meaning of the feast of trumpets. In Numbers 10:9, we are told,

And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.

One of the most popular radio programs in the 1930s was a news report and commentary called “Time Marches On,” a very grim bit of radio dramatization of bad news. The idea of the “march of time” as the march of evil is very prevalent, and it does have a shadow of truth to it. We see the world around us grow more evil; our loved ones sicken and die; our children become enmeshed in evils and troubles, and we ourselves grow older and wearier. A very fine Christian woman, childless, who died in the late 1960s, told me that, seeing the coming evils, she was glad now to leave no children behind to suffer in the coming years of grief.

This feast, however, requires the believer to think differently. Every new month brings closer God’s victory. Every seeming triumph of evil is a prelude to its judgment and destruction. The beginnings of a new month, and the blowing of trumpets, tell us, “ye shall be saved from your enemies” (Num. 10:9).

We too often view the passing of time humanistically. We grow older, our problems increase, and the world looks bleaker. But in Christ we are heirs of victory in time and eternity, and in death as in life. Time only brings closer Christ’s total victory.

Chapter Fifty-Five

The Day of Atonement

(*Numbers 29:7-11*)

7. And ye shall have on the tenth day of this seventh month an holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your souls: ye shall not do any work therein:
8. But ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the LORD for a sweet savour; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year; they shall be unto you without blemish:
9. And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals to a bullock, and two tenth deals to one ram,
10. A several tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs:
11. One kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the sin offering of atonement, and the continual burnt offering, and the meat offering of it, and their drink offerings. (Numbers 29:7-11)

These verses require preparation and sacrifices for the Day of Atonement. The day was to be spent in *afflicting* one's soul. The word *afflict* can be translated as *humble*. The stress was on *repentance*. This was the only *fast* day required in the law, although special occasions could call for fasting and prayer.

Fasting in the Old Testament could be total abstinence from food, or partial abstinence, as with Daniel in Daniel 10:3. The Pharisees fasted twice in a week to claim a special holiness, and our Lord ridiculed them for it (Luke 18:12); the Pharisees turned fasting into a meritorious work, whereas it is commanded only on the Day of Atonement to focus the people's minds on repentance.

The Day of Atonement concluded with feasting; and it was in the evening a time of celebration.

The full ritual of the Day of Atonement is given in Leviticus 16. The goat referred to in v. 11 is the goat for Azazel; the other was sacrificed. The Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, was observed on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:26-32; Heb. 9:7-12, 23-28).

Nothing that man did or can do affects atonement; atonement is God's sovereign act of grace. What man was and is required to do is to reorder and reform his life by repentance and self-discipline into greater conformity to God. By means of self-examination, we are to bring ourselves into faithfulness to God's law.

Irving L. Jensen called attention to five aspects of the offerings of Numbers 28 and 29. *First*, "The offerings were not man-instituted nor man-desired; they were God's." We are therefore to feel no merit whatsoever in bringing to God what He orders us to give Him. The merit lies in His mercy and His predestinating choice of us.

Second, basic to all the offerings were the daily offerings. "Fellowship with God was not to be a spasmodic thing, but a continuous reality." God does not function on the Sabbaths only!

Third, the basic and fundamental sacrifice was the burnt offering, which “represented the yielding of the person to God.” It signifies that we are not our own but the Lord’s.

Fourth, all the feasts, culminating in the Feast of Tabernacles, “emphasized joy and thanksgiving.”

Fifth, “these prescribed feasts were to be supplemented by the vows and freewill offerings of individuals to be offered to God at anytime (29:39).”¹⁹¹

There is, in all the laws of sacrifice, an obvious stress on the costliness of worship. Cheap religion is a modern invention. In fact, some groups have offered various formulae for getting rich, or prospering by obeying certain church or cult rules.

Some present this cheap religion as though it represents a triumph of the Reformation, which is very clearly a perversion. In fact, the emphasis too often in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant circles is now on cheap religion. God is too often presented as a cosmic Santa Claus who only needs to have His arm twisted by prayer!

As against this, God requires both sacrifices on our part *and* sorrow for sins, afflicting our souls. Andrew Bonar wrote, with respect to this self-humbling on the Day of Atonement,

Sorrow for sin seems to be like the rough sand that a man uses to rub off rust from iron; sorrow searches and rubs sore on the soul, but at the same time effectually removes what cleaved to the soul before. The vessel is thus rinsed of the flavour of former wines and left quite clean for the new wine of the kingdom. *Sorrow* does not take away the *sin*, but it frees the emptied vessel (the pardoned soul) from the former relish it had for earth. It is thus that the Lord’s children pass through fire and water to the wealthy place. For this reason it is that their souls are tried with the spiritual griefs and outward tribulation.¹⁹²

The Day of Atonement came six months after the Passover. The two festivals are combined into one for Christians, in that the days of atonement and resurrection are our days of Good Friday and Easter (or, Resurrection Day).

On the Day of Atonement, the sins of the whole year past were to be remembered and confessed to God.

The Day of Atonement was an important, if not the *central*, day of the Hebrew religious calendar, together with the Passover. The emphasis here is not simply public: it is personal. “Ye shall afflict your souls” (v. 7). Instead of concentrating on the high priest, and on the details of the ritual of atonement, the sacrifices are tied to the duty of self-examination, repentance, and confession. Atonement is an objective fact; it is the work of God’s sovereign grace and mercy, and it does not depend on anything we do. However, those in whom God’s grace is manifest do reveal that fact by their reaction, and by their submission to His sovereign dealings with us.

The goat referred to in v. 11 is the one over whom the high priest confessed the sins of all the people. According to Leviticus 16:21,

And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.

God separated the people's sin and guilt by laying it all upon an unblemished guilt-bearer. Geerhardus Vos wrote of this sacrifice:

It means that the animal cannot have been considered the mere double of the offerer; it must have been a second person different from the offerer. In answering what was transferred to the animal-substitute we cannot, of course, be guided by the above analogies. There is independent evidence to show that the transferred thing was nothing else but the sin, i.e., the liability to death-punishment on the part of the offerer. In the ritual of the Day of Atonement, which we may consider the culminating occasion of the whole ritual system, Aaron is told to lay his hands on the head of the second goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people. This second goat was not a sacrifice to be slain after the ordinary manner; it was sent away into the wilderness for the purpose of symbolically removing the sin. Yet it formed with the other goat in reality one sacrificial object; the distribution of suffering death and of dismissal into a remote place simply serving the purpose of clearer expression, in visible form, of the removal of sin after expiation had been made, something which the ordinary sacrificial animal could not well express, since it died in the process of expiation. We are certainly warranted, when here the hands convey sin and where the same ceremony occurs in ordinary sacrifice, in drawing the conclusion that on every such occasion sins are transferred.¹⁹³

The offerings of the Day of Atonement were of three kinds. *First*, there were the usual daily offerings; *second*, there were special offerings for each holy day; and, *third*, there was the sin offering of atonement.

S.R. Driver and H.A. White said, "The Day of Atonement represents the culminating institution of the Levitical system."¹⁹⁴ Because the necessary foundation of man's entire relationship to God is atonement and the remission of sins, the rest of man's life depends entirely on this fact of atonement. With atonement, man is under grace and is commissioned to do service to God; without atonement, he is an enemy of God and at war with his own God-created being.

The word *atonement* puts together three syllables, *at-one-ment*, and it accurately conveys the meaning of the Biblical doctrine of reconciliation with God. More than one religion believes in reconciliation, but the differing concepts are in essence humanistic. More than a few religions see reconciliation as self-purification. In some religions, charity is seen as a necessary aspect of this self-purification, and men will don a monk's robe and become beggars for charity for a time. The editors of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* see "death as the final atonement for sin," and the

statement, “May my death be an expiation for all my sins,” is a formula recited when the end is near.¹⁹⁵ The sad fallacy here is that death comes to all men. Can anyone, by reciting this sentence at death, make atonement for their sins? The radical departure of Judaism from Biblical faith is very evident here.

At the same time, we are seeing a drift within the churches in two directions. *First*, with many there is an outright denial of any need for Christ’s blood atonement. This is the mark of modernist churches. *Second*, in many evangelical churches, there is affirmation without knowledge. People speak of being saved by the blood of Jesus without any concern for the meaning of the doctrine of atonement, what reconciliation means, the relationship of grace to law, or the implications of atonement for social order.

There is, however, a *third* factor which has a long history and is now more prevalent than ever before. Atonement has been replaced by the sacrament which celebrates it; the *fact* of atonement, a judicial act, has given way to a mystical observance in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant circles. This is like replacing the *fact* of family with the *word* family.

Chapter Fifty-Six
The Feast of Ingathering
(Numbers 29:12-40)

12. And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work, and ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days:

13. And ye shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD; thirteen young bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year; they shall be without blemish:

14 And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals unto every bullock of the thirteen bullocks, two tenth deals to each ram of the two rams,

15 And a several tenth deal to each lamb of the fourteen lambs:

16. And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.

17. And on the second day ye shall offer twelve young bullocks, two rams, fourteen lambs of the first year without spot:

18. And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

19. And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and the meat offering thereof, and their drink offerings.

20. And on the third day eleven bullocks, two rams, fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish;

21. And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

22. And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering.

23. And on the fourth day ten bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish:

24. Their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

25. And one kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.

26. And on the fifth day nine bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without spot:

27. And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

28. And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering.

29. And on the sixth day eight bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish:

30. And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:

31. And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.
32. And on the seventh day seven bullocks, two rams, and fourteen lambs of the first year without blemish:
33. And their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullocks, for the rams, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:
34. And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, his meat offering, and his drink offering.
35. On the eighth day ye shall have a solemn assembly: ye shall do no servile work therein:
36. But ye shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD: one bullock, one ram, seven lambs of the first year without blemish:
37. Their meat offering and their drink offerings for the bullock, for the ram, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the manner:
38. And one goat for a sin offering; beside the continual burnt offering, and his meat offering, and his drink offering.
39. These things ye shall do unto the LORD in your set feasts, beside your vows, and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your meat offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings.
40. And Moses told the children of Israel according to all that the LORD commanded Moses. (Numbers 29:12-40)

These verses are concerned with the last of the great feasts of the religious calendar of Israel. It is the last thanksgiving celebration at the end of the fruit harvest and it goes under a variety of names. In Leviticus 23:33-36, it is called the “feast of booths,” also “the feast of tabernacles.” In Leviticus 23:39, it is called “a feast unto the LORD” because thanksgiving is religiously so important a virtue. Man’s mind is usually fixed on what he wants today and tomorrow, not on yesterday’s care and bounty. In John 7:37, it is referred to, with respect to its last day, as “that great day of the feast.” It was also known as “the feast of ingathering.” This name tells us much. Just as a fruit harvest marked the occasion, so, too, in time, a harvest of all peoples would take place, a great ingathering of the nations. Alfred Edersheim called attention to the form of its celebration at the Temple in Christ’s day:

Indeed, the whole symbolism of the Feast, beginning with the completed harvest, for which it was a thanksgiving, pointed to the future. The Rabbis themselves admitted this. The strange number of sacrificial bullocks—seventy in all—they regarded as referring to the seventy nations of heathendom. The ceremony of the outpouring of water, which was considered of such vital importance as to give to the whole festival the name of ‘House of Outpouring,’ was symbolical of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As the brief night of the great Temple-illumination closed, there was solemn testimony made before Jehovah against heathenism. It must have been a stirring scene, when from out of the mass of Levites, with their musical instruments, who crowded the fifteen steps that led from the Court of Israel to that of the Women, stepped two priests with their silver trumpets. As the first cockcrowing intimated the dawn of morn, they blew a threefold blast as they

entered the Court of Women. And, still sounding their trumpets, they marched through the court of the Women to the Beautiful Gate. Here, turning round and facing westwards to the Holy Place, they repeated: 'Our fathers, who were in this place, they turned their backs on the Sanctuary of Jehovah, and their faces eastward, for they worshipped eastward, the sun; but we, our eyes are towards Jehovah.' Nay, the whole of this night- and morningscene was symbolical: the Temple-illumination, of the light which was to shine from out of the Temple into the dark night of heathendom; then, at the first dawn of morn the blast of the priests' silver trumpets, of the army of God, as it advanced, with festive trumpet-sound and call, to awaken the sleepers, marching on to quite the utmost bound of the Sanctuary, to the Beautiful Gate, which opened upon the Court of the Gentiles— and, then again, facing round to utter solemn protest against the heathenism, and make solemn confession to Jehovah!¹⁹⁶

Since seven and seventy were symbols of fulness, the reference to seventy nations was meant to include the totality of all nations, whatever their number. The meaning of the Feast of Ingathering was thus clearly recognized: it was a giving of thanks to God for the harvest of food, and, at the same time, it was to remind one and all of the necessary ingathering of all nations to the Messiah and to celebrate that fact. Judea sinned with knowledge in rejecting Jesus Christ.

Originally, this festival was celebrated in tents or booths made of branches. This was to remind them of their origins in the long wilderness march from Egypt to Canaan. It stressed also the transitory nature of life: their goal was a world kingdom under the Messiah, a future order. Hebrews 11:8-10 stresses that this movement towards the Kingdom of God has marked God's true people from Abraham's day:

8. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.
9. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:
10. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

What God's purposes were had been spelled out over the centuries.

In this feast, the people celebrated both their beginnings and their future under God. We are told in John 7 that, at this Feast of Ingathering, our Lord declared Himself to the people, and the chief priests and Pharisees sought to have Him arrested (John 7:45-46). The officers sent to arrest Jesus said, "Never man spake like this man." The answer of the Pharisees was like that of our modern intellectuals and rulers. They asked, "Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?" (John 7:46-48). It was not respectable to believe in Jesus Christ!

More sacrifices were offered at this feast than at any other. On the first day, thirteen young bullocks were offered; on the second day, twelve bullocks; on the third day, eleven; on the fourth

day, ten; on the fifth day, nine; on the sixth day, eight; on the seventh day, seven; on the eighth day, one. Thomas Scott said of this,

The decrease of the number of bullocks, which were sacrificed on the several days of this feast, until on the last and great day only one was offered, is the most observable circumstance in this law. And the reason of this regulation is not evident; unless it be intimated that the Mosaic institution would gradually wax old, and at length vanish away, when the promised Messiah came.¹⁹⁷

Apart from those offered on the eighth day, the sacrifices totaled seventy bulls, fourteen rams, ninety-eight yearling lambs, and seven he-goats.

We have a very important reference to this festival in Zechariah 14:16-21. It declares that those who depart from this feast in all its implications will face God's judgment and drought. Besides a lack of rain, there will be plagues on all who fail to become a part of God's Kingdom and to make all things "HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD."

16. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.

17. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

18. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

19. This shall be the punishment (or, sin) of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

20. In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar.

21. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts. (Zech. 14:16-21)

What Zechariah tells us is this: in the Christian era, the Kingdom of God, the true Jerusalem, will either be the center and totality of the lives of men and nations, or God will judge them radically and at the same time prosper His true Kingdom. As Thomas V. Moore (1818- 1871) noted, this is a prediction concerning the theocracy. The distinction between the sacred and the profane was introduced by sin, but God's regeneration will obliterate this by making all things holy to His people.¹⁹⁸

Moore observed further:

All shall be happy because all shall be holy. Sorrow shall cease because sin shall cease. The groaning earth shall be mantled with joy because the trail of the serpent shall be gone, and the Eden of the future make us cease to look back with longing at the Eden of the past. If then a man would have the beginnings of Heaven, it must be by this absolute consecration of everything to God on earth, for precisely as “holiness to the Lord” is upon the “bells of the horses,” shall their melody have the ring of the golden harps. Let a man’s life be a liturgy, a holy service of acted worship, and his death shall be a sweeter melody than the failed song of the dying swan, and his eternity the song of Moses and the Lamb.¹⁹⁹

It is hard to realize now that the thinking of men like Moore was a powerful factor in the early years of the American republic.

Morgan’s comment on these festivals is worthy of attention:

Thus the whole year was covered and conditioned by these solemn religious rites and ceremonies. Every day as it broke and passed, every week as it began, every month as it opened, every year both as it commenced and closed was sealed with the sacred matters which ever spoke to the people of the relation they bore to God, as based on sacrifice and expressing itself in service.²⁰⁰

Rituals and holy days are very much eroded in our time. Biblical holy days in the Christian calendar have given way to statist holidays, and now these are losing their meaning as anything more than a day off from work, or to watch sports on television. Rituals and observances go out of life when meaning disappears from life. It is interesting that a Nobel prize in literature was given in 1981 to Elias Canetti, who fathered “absurdist literature in Germany.”²⁰¹ Jacob Isaacs said of Canetti’s novel, *Auto-da-Fe*, “It has wisdom and fairness, lunacy, and comic invention on a grand Satanic scale.”²⁰² Canetti’s vision is of a humanity living on an animal level with no consciousness of God or of the possibility of death, i.e., like animals. In Ernst Waldinger’s words,

Here, as in anything of a religious character, the thought of a conquest of death seems to play a part in Canetti’s concept: Man as he will be in future, according to Canetti, has no ego-consciousness and thus a personal death is unknown to him—while the crowd, the true unit of humanity, is immortal, however much single individuals may come and go.²⁰³

Peter von Haselberg regards Canetti’s novel as “the first step beyond Joyce’s *Ulysses*,” because it obliterates “the boundary between real happenings and fantasies.”²⁰⁴ According to Canetti, in *Die Provinz des Menschen*,

God was a mistake. But it is difficult to tell whether it was too soon or too late.²⁰⁵

Without holy days and holy living all our days, life becomes a Canetti lunacy, fit only for men like himself, placeless, meaningless, and deracinated. Their contempt for the rest of us is very

clear. But their ingathering is no feast but death and hell. God will have His ingathering or harvest one way or another.

Chapter Fifty-Seven

A Woman's Vows

(Numbers 30:1-16)

1. And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded.
2. If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.
3. If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth;
4. And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand.
5. But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her.
6. And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul;
7. And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand.
8. But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her.
9. But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her.
10. And if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath;
11. And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her, and disallowed her not: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand.
12. But if her husband hath utterly made them void on the day he heard them; then whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand: her husband hath made them void; and the LORD shall forgive her.
13. Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void.
14. But if her husband altogether hold his peace at her from day to day; then he establisheth all her vows, or all her bonds, which are upon her: he confirmeth them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard them.
15. But if he shall any ways make them void after that he hath heard them; then he shall bear her iniquity.

16. These are the statutes, which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, between the father and his daughter, being yet in her youth in her father's house. (Numbers 30:1-16)

The law here with respect to vows is, of course, case law. It has implications with respect to authority. As it reads, it concerns (1) men who are of age and independent; (2) daughters and wives; (3) women who made a vow while married but no longer are married; and (4) widows and divorced women.

This obviously is a law of far-reaching implications because here alone in the law do we find that statement, "And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel" (v. 1); usually, Moses is commanded to speak to the children of Israel. Obviously, we have a law of importance and different in kind.

The issue is vows to the Lord. This can be a simple matter, as in v. 13, a vow to afflict the soul, which most likely means fasting for a religious reason. The reference is not to obedience to God's law but to some observance or service beyond that which is commanded. This is made clear in Deuteronomy 23:21-23:

21. When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee.

22. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee.

23. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth.

This tells us more clearly what is involved. A man or woman may be moved with gratitude to do something for or give something to the Lord's work above and beyond what the law requires. This can mean, as in v. 13, fasting; it can mean a freewill offering of money or of service. God gives this law, *first*, to encourage all such vows, and, *second*, to regulate them so that godly order is not disrupted. Too often people seek to serve God in ways disruptive of order and of godly authority. As a result, this law is given to provide a guide to men and to women.

First, the assumption of v. 2 is with respect to men who are heads of households. Any vow they make to the Lord is not conditional upon the authority of a superior authority. This means that a vow by a young man or a dependent adult can be disallowed by the head of the household. No man can disannul a law of God, but a freewill vow to give something which can affect the husband, father, or household head requires approval. If, however, the head of a family makes a vow to the Lord, he is bound unconditionally to obey it.

We have forgotten such vows since World War II in particular. Before that time, at least in rural California, given the drought and depression, some farmers would ask for God's blessing and vow to give a certain sum at the end of the harvest. This tells us two things: *first*, the kind of vow I have cited is a *conditional* one; it is a recognition that no man can control all the factors in his

life, as with a farmer, weather, and a depressed economy. Rash vows are thus unwise. Our Lord refers to precisely this in Matthew 5:33-37:

33. Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

35. Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Our Lord is here commenting on our text, *and also* on Leviticus 19:12:

And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

The Quakers, not at all interested in the law, took our Lord's words simplistically and ignorantly; our Lord was not abolishing Numbers 30 or Deuteronomy 23:21-23. He was indicting false and rash vows. The Christian version, as with the farmers cited, has been a realistic vow that realizes that no man is in control of all factors. As a result, the Christian formula has been, "So will I do, so help me, God." The words, "so help me, God," recognize man's dependence on God's providence. This fact tells us much about the meaning of freewill vows. All are dependent upon a higher authority. A man may have no other man over him as he vows, but he must be mindful of the laws of Leviticus 19:12 and Deuteronomy 23:21-23. The vows our Lord condemns are boastful ones; they abuse the prerogatives of God, and they assume an autonomous power that is fictitious. Thus, what we see here, and in our Lord's words as well as the related laws, is the contingent nature of all our living.

In present Jewish practice, on the Day of Atonement, a man disavows all unfulfilled vows in order to escape judgment. In its meaning, however, the law stresses the freewill nature of all such vowing, *and* the fact of contingency. The head of a family has the power to disannul a vow made by a wife or daughter. He must judge as to whether or not her vow is governed by rash zeal rather than sound faith. He must use godly judgment, not to stifle faith, but to keep it stable and healthy. This means that the man, while in vowing he may have no other man over him, must *necessarily* see God as over him. His vow must be realistic. He cannot vow in a way to damage the family, nor to assume that he is independent of family responsibilities. To illustrate, it was not uncommon for medieval men to vow to make a certain pilgrimage if God answered their prayers. Such a pilgrimage often left the family in serious trouble.

There is another aspect to this law which is very important. The priests, and by clear implication the church, are given no determining power in any controversy about vows. About a century ago, the Rev. Robert A. Watson commented on this chapter thus:

It would have been well if the wisdom of this law had ruled the Church, preventing ecclesiastical dominance in family affairs. The promises, the threats of a domineering Church have in many cases introduced discord between daughters and parents, wives and husbands. The amenability of women to religious motives has been taken advantage of, always indeed with a plausible reason,—the desire to save them from the world,—but far too often, really, for political-ecclesiastical ends, or even from the base motive of revenge.²⁰⁶

The authority of the husband is also strictly limited. According to v. 15, when the wife makes a vow, the husband must express his dissent at once. He cannot at a later date, when he is angry with her, reach back in time to disallow her vow. When our Lord says that our “*communication* be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay,” (Matt. 5:37), He means that no man, because he is angry with his wife, can go back on his word on a vow or on anything else. Our word should be as good as a legal bond. There can be no retroactive veto by the husband or father without guilt before God.

Our Lord also, in Matthew 15:3-9, condemns the voiding of the duty to care for one’s parents on the grounds that the necessary funds for their support have been vowed to God. This is using God’s name to break God’s law.

The ancient rule was that silence gives consent. A man could, according to rabbinic law, ask for as much as twenty-four hours to consider his wife’s or daughter’s vow. Beyond that, his silence gave consent, a premise still with us.

A vow was a promise to God; this is why our Lord says it is wrong to swear by heaven, or the temple, or anything at all, since the seriousness of a vow to God is enough. Ecclesiastes 5:4 warns,

When thou vowest unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

Since nothing can be greater than God, any vow made to Him needs no sworn validation, and to violate it is to be a fool.

A vow was normally accompanied by a sacrifice (Lev. 7:16), and being enabled to keep a vow should be a cause for thanksgiving (Ps. 50:14).

Vows could be made by a people. In Numbers 21:2, Israel vowed that if God delivered their enemies into their hands, they would destroy their cities. In Judges 11:30-31, we have a related vow by Jephthah, but a rash one, in that it led him to believe that keeping a vow could require sin. In 1 Samuel 1:11, we see Hannah vowing to give her son to the Lord if God gave her a son. Both Jephthah’s and Hannah’s vows were personal but involved more than themselves.

As Wenham pointed out, we see vows and fasts in the New Testament, in Matthew 6:16, Mark 2:20, and Acts 13:2, 18:18, and 21:23; thus, our Lord’s words in Matthew 5:33-37 did not abolish vows.

The reason why the husband or father had oversight where a wife or daughter made a vow was to prevent rash vows which, however well-intended, could adversely affect family life. This meant that the head of the household had to be responsible, not only to annul rash vows, but to avoid himself any rash vows that would harm the family. Commenting on Deuteronomy 23:21-23, Calvin wrote:

On this point, then, God justly rescues His name from contempt, and to this end demands that what has been promised to Him should be paid. But inasmuch as superstitious persons apply this, or rather wrest it indiscriminately to all vows, their error must be refuted, so that we may understand the genuine meaning of Moses. The Papist would have all vows kept without exception, because it is written, "Thou shalt not slack to pay whatsoever hath passed your lips." But a definition of vows must first be given, or at least we must see what vows are lawful and approved by God; for if all vows must be effectually kept, however rashly made, of old under the Law it would have been right to kill their sons and daughters, to erect altars to idols, and thus under this pretext the whole Law of God would have been entirely brought to nought. Wherefore a distinction between vows must be laid down, unless we wish to confound right and wrong. This then is the first point, that nothing can be properly vowed to God, except what we know to be pleasing to Him; for if "to obey is better than sacrifice," (I Sam. xv. 22), nothing surely can be more absurd than to indulge ourselves in the liberty of serving God, each according to his own fancy. If a Jew had vowed that he would sacrifice a dog, it would have been sacrilege to pay that vow, since it was forbidden by God's Law. But inasmuch as there is an intermediate degree between that which God has expressly prescribed and forbidden, it might be objected that it was allowable to make a vow in respect to things which are called indifferent. My reply to this is, that since the principle ought always to be maintained by the godly, that nothing is to be done without faith, (Rom xiv. 23), it must ever be considered whether a thing is agreeable to God's word, otherwise our zeal is preposterous.²⁰⁷

What the law here closely guards against is foolish pretensions to holiness made by people who make vows that are sanctimonious foolishness. God makes it clear what He *requires*; He welcomes the grateful gifts above and over tithes, duties, and legitimate obligations. He does not permit pretentious piety and pretentious holiness. These texts guard against any claim to legitimacy in acts of foolishness. This is why the chapter and law is addressed to the clan *heads*.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

War Against Midian, Part 1

(Numbers 31:1-12)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people.
3. And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the LORD of Midian.
4. Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war.
5. So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.
6. And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand.
7. And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.
8. And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.
9. And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods.
10. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire.
11. And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts.
12. And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and unto the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by Jordan near Jericho. (Numbers 31:1-12)

This chapter is regarded by some as the most infamous in all the Bible. Enemies of the faith have over the centuries made routine use of it.

It is important for us to see first of all who the Midianites were. They were a nation related to Israel. In Genesis 25:1-4, we see that their ancestor was Midian, a child of Abraham by his second wife, Keturah (1 Chronicles 1:32-33). Moses's first wife had been a Midianite woman, but her father, Jethro, had separated himself from Midian and was a man of God, a priest (Exodus 2:16-22). The Midianites lived by raiding, and, in Judges 6-8, we see their habit of coming in at harvest time to strip the people bare of their harvests.

The Midianites were close to the Moabites in their culture and outlook. In Numbers 25, when, at the counsel of Balaam, the women of Moab *and* Midian involved the men of Israel in their fertility cult rites, we see that the woman killed by Phinehas was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur, listed in Numbers 31:8 as a king over one of the Midianite city-states. There were various clans

of Midianites, some more peaceful and later friendly to Israel. Those now before Israel were peoples dedicated to raiding and to fertility cult practices. Allen Edwardes said of the Midianites that they were “sex worshipers” and their women very promiscuous.²⁰⁸ However, very little research has been done on the subject of Midian, and fertility cults in general have received too little attention by scholars, despite their widespread prevalence. Perhaps the subject comes too close to home, and it also vindicates certain things in Scripture.

There is another gap in our knowledge here, a medical one. No attempt has been made to trace the relationship of fertility cult practices to the spread of venereal and other diseases and epidemics, although, in answer to a question many years ago, one scholar admitted that there were doubtless many connections. He expressed no interest in the problem. Given the rapid rise of numerous sexually transmitted diseases as a result of the sexual “revolution” of the 1960s and on, it seems curious that no serious consideration is given to a long history of certain practices and their consequences.

This chapter is regarded as highly offensive because God here commands the destruction of the Canaanite branch of the Midianite people. Any move against the ungodly and criminals is unpopular with evil peoples. A man whose inner affinity is to evil will tolerate evil more than the good. This is the problem with modern juries: their sympathies are too often with the criminal, in some cases even with rapists. Justice cannot function in the abstract: it requires a godly people, as judges, juries, and citizens.

God makes it clear in v. 3 that this is really His war; it is against the Canaanite Midianites. God assumes the initiative and the responsibility for this war. Since Balaam was one of those slain (v. 8), it means that he had either returned from his home, or stayed on, in order to strike at both God and His people. It seems clear from Balaam’s presence that more assaults would be made on Israel’s faith, character, and existence.

There is a remarkable aspect to this campaign. It was a sudden strike against a hostile Midian, which, however much it may have been preparing a new strategy, did not expect Israel to take the initiative. We are told (v. 49) that not a single Israelite died in this campaign. The campaign is called the Lord’s vengeance on Midian. That nation’s effort to pervert all Israel into fertility cult practices had incurred God’s wrath. God does not take apostasy or sin lightly. We read in Exodus 32:9ff., and in Numbers 11 and in 14:11ff., that God was ready to execute all Israel except for Moses’s intercession. James tells us that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16); who is now ready to pray for our people and their redemption? We must remember, too, that, in spite of Moses’s intercession, all the older generation save two were sentenced to die in the wilderness. This was not an obliteration of all Israel, but it was a great judgment.

Because this was a war ordered by God, Phinehas, son of the high priest Eleazar, accompanied the soldiers and was to a degree a leader (v. 6). The battle was a successful surprise attack. In an age of total war, it is hypocritical to condemn the attack on Midian as wrong.

Balaam is listed in v. 8 together with the five kings of Midian’s city-states as among those slain. Given the legal language of Scripture, this means that Balaam had gained high status in the

Midianite councils of state. Balaam's counsel that the Midianite women make themselves available to Israelite men in fertility cult practices had led to a plague that killed some 24,000 men (Num. 25:9). We know from history that a people with no exposure to any new disease, venereal or otherwise, often have no resistance to it. Israel, after almost forty years in the wilderness, had no such immunity, and, as a result, succumbed to diseases which the seducing women themselves had much tolerance to. In the late 1940s, I saw the death and very serious illnesses created by measles on hitting the Western Shoshone Reservation; there had previously been no such epidemic save one in 1911; isolation had protected them.

Balaam had cleverly found a means of not only *corrupting* Israel, but also *killing* its manpower. His presence with the kings indicates that more of the same strategy was being planned, perhaps more deviously the second time.

Baal-Peor is the Baal of Peor, essentially the same god as Preipus, to whom all virgins had to prostitute themselves. It was a naturalistic religion whose premise was, in Alexander Pope's words, "whatever is, is right." It has been a faith advocated in our time by Lenny Bruce, Hugh Hefner, and many others.

Calvin's comment is pertinent:

Amongst the other prerogatives which God conferred upon His Church, this one is celebrated, that He armed the godly "to execute vengeance upon the heathen,—to execute upon them the judgment that is written," (Ps. cxlix. 7-9) and although the Spirit declares that this should happen under the kingdom of Christ, still He refers to ancient examples, one of which, well worthy of remembrance, is here recorded. The Midianites had organized a wicked conspiracy for the destruction of God's people: and God, in undertaking to punish this cruel act of theirs, gave a striking proof of His paternal favour towards the Israelites; whilst His grace is doubled by His constituting them the ministers of His judgment. This passage, therefore, shews us how anxious God was for the welfare of His elect people, when He so set Himself against their enemies, as if He would make common cause in all respects with them. At the same time we must observe this additional favour towards them, that although the Israelites themselves were not without blame, He still deigned to appoint them as judges of the Midianites. Inasmuch, however, as He everywhere prohibits His people from indulging in the lust of vengeance, we must not forget the distinction between men's vengeance and His own. He would have His servants, by patiently bearing injuries, overcome evil with good; while, at the same time, He by no means abdicates His own power, but still reserves to Himself the right of inflicting punishment. Nay, Paul, desiring to exhort believers to long-suffering, recalls them to the principle, that God takes upon Himself the office of avenging. Since, then, God is at liberty to execute vengeance, not only by Himself, but also by His ministers, as we have already seen, these two things are not inconsistent with each other, that the passions of the godly are laid under restraint by the Word, that they should not, when injured, seek for vengeance, or retaliate the evils they have received, and still that they are the just and legitimate executioners of God's vengeance, when the sword is put

into their hands. It remains, that whosoever is called to this office, should punish crime with honest zeal, as the minister of God, and not as acting in his own private cause. God here instructed the office of vengeance upon His people, but by no means in order that they might indulge the lust of their nature: for their feeling ought to have been this, that they should have been ready to pardon the Midianites, and still that they should heartily bestir themselves to inflict punishment upon them.²⁰⁹

A key verse in this text is v. 6, which orders Phinehas to lead the way and to blow the holy trumpets. This meant that the war was fought with God's blessing and under His orders. Both Jewish and Christian commentators have struggled to explain away this chapter or to "apologize" for God. Given the evils that our present age both perpetuates and tolerates, this is arrogance indeed. Such people will not allow God to require judgment. As a result, we live in a time of God's judgments upon the nations. In God's universe, men may tolerate evil, but then God moves against all such men and their evils.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

War Against Midian, Part 2

(Numbers 31:13-54)

13. And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp.
14. And Moses was wroth with the officers of the host, with the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, which came from the battle.
15. And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive?
16. Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.
17. Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him.
18. But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.
19. And do ye abide without the camp seven days: whosoever hath killed any person, and whosoever hath touched any slain, purify both yourselves and your captives on the third day, and on the seventh day.
20. And purify all your raiment, and all that is made of skins, and all work of goats' hair, and all things made of wood.
21. And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD commanded Moses;
22. Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead,
23. Every thing that may abide the fire, ye shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation: and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water.
24. And ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp.
25. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
26. Take the sum of the prey that was taken, both of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief fathers of the congregation:
27. And divide the prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation:
28. And levy a tribute unto the LORD of the men of war which went out to battle: one soul of five hundred, both of the persons, and of the beeves, and of the asses, and of the sheep:
29. Take it of their half, and give it unto Eleazar the priest, for an heave offering of the LORD.
30. And of the children of Israel's half, thou shalt take one portion of fifty, of the persons, of the beeves, of the asses, and of the flocks, of all manner of beasts, and give them unto the Levites, which keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD.
31. And Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses.
32. And the booty, being the rest of the prey which the men of war had caught, was six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand sheep,

33. And threescore and twelve thousand beeves,
 34. And threescore and one thousand asses,
 35. And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of woman that had not known man by lying with him.
 36. And the half, which was the portion of them that went out to war, was in number three hundred thousand and seven and thirty thousand and five hundred sheep:
 37. And the LORD's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and threescore and fifteen.
 38. And the beeves were thirty and six thousand; of which the LORD's tribute was threescore and twelve.
 39. And the asses were thirty thousand and five hundred; of which the LORD's tribute was threescore and one.
 40. And the persons were sixteen thousand; of which the LORD's tribute was thirty and two persons.
 41. And Moses gave the tribute, which was the LORD's heave offering, unto Eleazar the priest, as the LORD commanded Moses.
 42. And of the children of Israel's half, which Moses divided from the men that warred,
 43. (Now the half that pertained unto the congregation was three hundred thousand and thirty thousand and seven thousand and five hundred sheep,
 44. And thirty and six thousand beeves,
 45. And thirty thousand asses and five hundred,
 46. And sixteen thousand persons;)

47. Even of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, both of man and of beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which kept the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses.
 48. And the officers which were over thousands of the host, the captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses:
 49. And they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us.
 50. We have therefore brought an oblation for the LORD, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the LORD.
 51. And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of them, even all wrought jewels.
 52. And all the gold of the offering that they offered up to the LORD, of the captains of thousands, and of the captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels.
 53. (For the men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.)
 54. And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of the congregation, for a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD. (Numbers 31:13-54)

In my student days, on some occasions, professors, either individually or in small groups, would at times be ready to include a few students in their conversations. I recall that on one occasion, I

laughed at the particularly foul customs of one so-called “primitive” group, and an anthropologist took me sharply to task; it was as though I had laughed and carried on in a disturbing way in church. Every “primitive” rite was to him sacred except Christian services.

On another occasion, I was questioned at length by a scholar engaged in medical research. His own faith was a Barthian modernism, but he was respectful of my beliefs. He was doubtful of much of the historicity of the Bible, but, to my surprise, took Numbers 31 in particular, and some similar incidents, very seriously. Many of the diseases called leprosy were now gone, he said, except for Hansen’s disease, which we term leprosy. He felt that many ancient plagues were gone but could possibly return. History was to him like a giant test tube: the right events, combinations of ailments, and human vulnerability could produce the devastations described in the Numbers 25:9 plague, a result of Israelite fertility cult practices. In Numbers 31, the necessity laid down that the men of war wash their clothes and bathe, stay out of the camp seven days, pass all metals, precious and base, through fire, *and* kill all females with sexual experience and all males, indicated to him an awareness of the potentially explosive nature of some diseases and epidemics. This scholar referred to the great flu epidemic after World War I, and the millions it killed, as an analogy. He was impressed with the Biblical laws of quarantine and cleanliness. I cited this as an interesting fact: a man who looked at certain events like Numbers 31 realistically found much to commend in them.

It is interesting to note that all booty which could not be purified by fire had to be placed in running water (or, “the water of separation,” v. 23) before it could be brought into the camp. Unusual precautions were taken on this occasion. All young males had to be executed, as well as all female non-virgins. Since young males in some cultures are early introduced into male lodges and sodomite practices, and the non-virgin females could be and likely were carriers of diseases which could wipe out many Israelites, this requirement was made by God *against* the intentions and plans of the soldiers.

Irving L. Jensen has provided a convenient table of the booty taken:

	Warriors	Priests	Congregation	Levities
	1/2	1/5000	1/2	1/50
sheep	337,500	675	337,500	6,750
oxen	36,000	72	36,000	720
asses	30,500	61	30,500	610
maidens	16,000	32	16,000	320

In gratitude to God for a victory without a casualty (v. 49), all the gold taken was given to the sanctuary. The gifts are described as given “to make atonement for our souls” (v. 50), not

because there was any war-guilt but in gratitude and to remain covered by God's mercies. In v. 54, it is described as a "memorial" gift.²¹⁰

Because this chapter is held up as an example of how evil the Biblical God and perspective is, it must be noted, *first*, that this was not a normal practice, nor a law for all warfare, but a specific commandment for a specific occasion. It gives no ground for generalization. *Second*, the modern humanistic objector is far more inhumane: he objects to capital punishment, favors abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, and more. The humanists increasingly defy moral consequences and deny the validity of any law or any contagion. They deny causality. I hear regularly about people kissing AIDS victims to prove their superior morality, and Christians who express shock at this are called heartless and immoral.

To illustrate, the granddaughter of the late oil baron Jean Paul Getty, came down with AIDS. Although having a history of cocaine abuse, she believes that she acquired AIDS from a surgical transfusion. She was married at one time to Christopher Wilding, a son of Elizabeth Taylor; she shares with Wilding custody of two sons, one adopted. Aileen Getty was so panic-stricken on learning of her case of AIDS that Elizabeth Taylor took her into her Bel-Air mansion and cradled Aileen Getty to sleep in her own bed night after night. Writer Kevin Sessvons described this cradling as "an American Pieta."²¹¹

We have, clearly, two mutually exclusive moralities at work in our world today. One condemns God and His law-word, and the other exalts what God requires, because there is neither truth nor law nor any good outside of God. Some describe this chapter as an example of primitivism, whereas we must say such people favor evil.

We must remember what the doctor told me and expand it. God's requirements here showed not only obvious concern with the physical safety and purity of Israel, but also concern for their moral purity. What God required was not what Israel had planned. The girls who were spared became a part of Israel and were later absorbed into it by marriage. One minor sidelight on this chapter is that, in the modern era, armies are demobilized slowly, and, on occasion, only after medical clearances.

In vv. 13-18, Moses and Eleazar go outside the camp to meet the returning army and to require the execution of the sexually experienced women *and* the quarantine for one week of all the soldiers and their booty. This was more than a normal procedure, and it again points to the fact of a serious danger of another epidemic, especially from the Midianite women. The quarantine was comparable to that of a leper, which tells us how seriously the need for purification was held to be.

This is a fact which even Martin Noth, a modernist, notes:

The leaders of the army are reproached by Moses with having left the Midianite women alive and brought back as prisoners, although it was these very women who had seduced the Israelites to Baal of Peor and had been the real reason for this war of vengeance ordered by Yahweh against the Midianites; they had been, therefore, the main culprits.²¹²

The Midianite women were all schooled in *religious* prostitution. Leviticus 19:29 strictly forbids God's people from allowing their daughters to become prostitutes, but what we have here in Midian is even worse, promiscuity in the name of religion. Varieties of religious prostitution have existed in many cultures, and they have been major sources of disease and social decay.

The curious fact is that Mohammed in the Koran orders massacres and seizures of women as a routine part of war, and a necessary part. God requires this on one occasion, and people who praise the Koran insist that the Bible is evil here and elsewhere. The bigotry and inconsistency of such critics is amazing. Ronald B. Allen's comment is telling:

Such stories are bound to raise questions about the morality of the OT. Ultimately, these questions are darts directed to the person of God. One cannot debate the "morality" of the OT apart from the "morality" of God who is represented in these passages. And once one begins to ask, "Is God moral?" the very question damns the speaker. For who is man to be the instructor of the Lord? (see Job 40:1-2).... Ultimately, people of faith affirm—in the midst of the most negative environment — "The God of Israel will do right."²¹³

Given the callousness of modern warfare, and given the nature of the warfare against the law-abiding in our streets, for men to condemn God is arrogance indeed. And, given the vindictive war against Christianity, being waged the world over against Christians, with about 300 killed daily, those who condemn Numbers 31 are telling us more about themselves than God.

T. E. Espin's comment was good:

The very words in which the command is given show that the war against the Midianites was no ordinary one. It was indeed less a war than the execution of a divine sentence against a most guilty people. The Midianites had corrupted, and, so far as in them lay, ruined God's people, body and soul; and had done this knowing, as after the overruling by God of Balaam's attempts to curse Israel they must have known, that in doing it they were openly rebelling against God. From God then a no less open retribution overtakes them....

...The sin therefore was national, and retribution could be no less so.²¹⁴

The presence of Balaam indicated that a new offensive was being planned against Israel; God ordered a strike to prevent this.

This text highlights a contemporary problem, the unwillingness of judges and juries to execute justice where it is due. Men who are guilty before God want an unending indulgence for sin. They are unwilling to condemn lest they be condemned. They say in effect to God, why can't you be as merciful as I am? What they are trying to do is to set an example for God, themselves. And this is arrogance, indeed.

Chapter Sixty
Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh
(Numbers 32:1-42)

1. Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle;
2. The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying,
3. Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon,
4. Even the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle:
5. Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan.
6. And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?
7. And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?
8. Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land.
9. For when they went up unto the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the LORD had given them.
10. And the LORD's anger was kindled the same time, and he sware, saying,
11. Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me:
12. Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD.
13. And the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed.
14. And, behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the LORD toward Israel.
15. For if ye turn away from after him, he will yet again leave them in the wilderness; and ye shall destroy all this people.
16. And they came near unto him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our cattle, and cities for our little ones:
17. But we ourselves will go ready armed before the children of Israel, until we have brought them unto their place: and our little ones shall dwell in the fenced cities because of the inhabitants of the land.
18. We will not return unto our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance.
19. For we will not inherit with them on yonder side Jordan, or forward; because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side Jordan eastward.

20. And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war,
21. And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him,
22. And the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD.
23. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.
24. Build you cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; and do that which hath proceeded out of your mouth.
25. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spake unto Moses, saying, Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth.
26. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our cattle, shall be there in the cities of Gilead:
27. But thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, as my lord saith.
28. So concerning them Moses commanded Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the chief fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel:
29. And Moses said unto them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over Jordan, every man armed to battle, before the LORD, and the land shall be subdued before you; then ye shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession:
30. But if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan.
31. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered, saying, As the LORD hath said unto thy servants, so will we do.
32. We will pass over armed before the LORD into the land of Canaan, that the possession of our inheritance on this side Jordan may be ours.
33. And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about.
34. And the children of Gad built Dibon, and Ataroth, and Aroer,
35. And Atroth, Shopan, and Jaazer, and Jogbehah,
36. And Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran, fenced cities: and folds for sheep.
37. And the children of Reuben built Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Kirjathaim,
38. And Nebo, and Baal-meon, (their names being changed,) and Shibmah: and gave other names unto the cities which they builded.
39. And the children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead, and took it, and dispossessed the Amorite which was in it.
40. And Moses gave Gilead unto Machir the son of Manasseh; and he dwelt therein.
41. And Jair the son of Manasseh went and took the small towns thereof, and called them Havoth-jair.

42. And Nobah went and took Kenath, and the villages thereof, and called it Nobah, after his own name. (Numbers 32:1-42)

The premise of the Tower of Babel is that man and history must have a centripetal force, and that force is man. Over the centuries, numerous efforts have been made to unite mankind into a one-world humanistic order. This has been a persistent dream and force. Beginning with the Tower of Babel, however, God has decreed the dispersion and the confusion of all such efforts (Gen. 11:1-9). God tolerates no centripetal force other than His law and Kingdom.

But men prefer their own way to God's way. In this chapter, we see the first tendency that eventually led to the disunion of Israel into various factions, then to a division into two kingdoms, and, with the end of self-rule in the intertestamental era, into warring factions and sects.

Two tribes or clans, Reuben and Gad, decided to stay on the east side of Jordan, outside of Canaan, or, the Promised land. Their excuse was to a degree a valid one. They were primarily sheep men, and that area was better adapted to sheep ranching. Reuben, as the firstborn of Leah, and Gad, as the firstborn of Zilpah, felt that some priority of choice should be given to them. Half the tribe of Manasseh, the son of Joseph, decided that they, too, wanted land on the east side of Jordan, and they seized the Gilead area and dispossessed the Amorites.

Their announced purpose included building "sheepfolds" (v. 6), a matter of interest to us, because three sheepfolds survive in this area, two of them in Tuolumne County. These are drystone wall corrals for keeping sheep in at night out in the hills and mountains. The walls would be built high enough to keep out wolves, bears, and other wild animals. A narrow opening allowed the sheep to enter, and the shepherd used his bedroll to sleep in that opening, as a bar to animals, or as a door. Our Lord refers to this fact in John 10:7-10:

7. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.
8. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.
9. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.
10. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Christ as the door guards His sheep from the enemy, whereas false shepherds, false pastors, kill and destroy them spiritually.

To return to Reuben and Gad, and the request of these two clans, the request was granted. Moses was used to dealing with the older generation, hard of heart, cynical, and rebellious. The younger generation was not without its faults, but it still had a different spirit. This comes out in vv. 25-27:

25. And the children of Gad and the children of Reuben spake unto Moses, saying, Thy servants will do as my lord commandeth.
26. Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our cattle, shall be there in the cities of Gilead:
27. But thy servants will pass over, every man armed for war, before the LORD to battle, as my lord saith.

This, as John Sturdy pointed out, was formal court language in the style commonly used in addressing a king.²¹⁵ Moses, who was so used to insults and disrespect, must have been startled by this. It was clear that another generation, very different from their fathers, stood before him. Another evidence of the difference appears in vv. 34-42, where we are told of the cities taken by Reuben and Gad, i.e., the clans of Reuben and Gad, and renamed to do away with pagan names.

About half the tribe of Manasseh decided that some of the same area was more suitable for them (vv. 33, 39-42), and Moses allowed them to settle into areas which had belonged to Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan; these men of Manasseh also seized Gilead and adjacent areas.

The initial response of Moses had been one of disgust and condemnation (vv. 6-15), but the gracious response of these clan leaders, and their firm promise to help in the conquest of Canaan, changed Moses's mind, as did their deferential courtesy. He had called them their fathers' children, "an increase (or, a brood) of sinful men" (v. 14), but this hard language did not alter their respectful approach to Moses. Their counter-proposal was a thoughtful one. They asked, *first*, that the available lands east of the Jordan be given to them. *Second*, they asked permission to build sheepfolds or corrals for their animals, and fortified cities for their wives and children, as protection in their absence (vv. 16-17, 24-26). The boys not of military age would then be in charge. Then, *third*, the fighting men would cross the Jordan with the rest of Israel to assist in the conquest.

In that era, the east side of Jordan was a forest of oaks, of rich soil, meadows, and also tillable land. It was then also well-watered by streams of various sizes. Its elevation is about 2,000 feet above sea level. While accepting their terms and promise, Moses issued a warning, one of the great statements on judgment:

23. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out.

This sentence was once a very common subject of sermons; it is now much neglected. In fact, in the midst of typing out that statement by Moses, I was interrupted by a telephone call from one of Chalcedon's supporters who works with troubled people in family services. He has a woman who faces hostility from her church for not allowing her children to see her father, who abused her sexually when she was young. She is told that "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8), a radical abuse of that text. Love has become the cure-all for all sins, a substitute "savior," and the churches have become the purveyors of a Satanic faith.

Moses knew that he would not be around to see if the clans of Reuben and Gad kept their promise. He therefore ordered Eleazar, the high priest, and Joshua, together with all the clan heads, to see to it that the terms of the agreement were met by Reuben and Gad. If these two tribes or clans fought with them to conquer the land, then they would be allowed to retain their lands east of the Jordan. If they refused to fight with them, they were to be dispossessed of the east Jordan areas and given whatever remained in the west Jordan area (vv. 28-32). This would be the leftover or least desirable areas.

In v. 1, the Reubenites are mentioned first because of their seniority among the sons of Jacob. Then, in v. 2, the Gadites are mentioned first, as in v. 6, and also v. 29. This is the same legal language that is used throughout the Bible; v. 1 thus pays respect to Reuben's priority, but thereafter, the terminology indicates that the actual leadership in this effort belongs to Gad.

There is another once famous sentence in our text, one not used, to my knowledge, since I was a child. In v. 6, Moses asks of Reuben and Gad, "Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here?" This was often used to arouse Christians to the fact that some responsibilities cannot be delegated. With the rise of humanistic statism, more and more problems are delegated to the worst possible place, to the state.

In v. 7, Moses asks, "Wherefore discourage ye the heart" of your fellow Israelites of the other tribes? The expression in the Hebrew is, literally, "make the heart to waver."²¹⁶

Moses has often been criticized for being overly suspicious of Reuben and Gad. To think so is seriously wrong. Moses had a realistic and experienced knowledge of the depravity of man. He had no right under God to assume a good motive on the part of these clans. It was his duty to ascertain the truth as a wise judge, and this is exactly what he did.

The text of vv. 16-32 makes it clear that the outcome of the request by Reuben and Gad was a covenant or contract which was formally agreed to by Gad, Reuben, and half of the tribe of Manasseh on the one side, and the other clans on the other side, with Eleazar and Joshua as the witnesses.

The three subclans of Manasseh involved were Machir, Jair, and Nobah (vv. 39-42); the other branches settled west of the Jordan. In v. 42, our attention is called to the fact that Nobah named the area he seized after himself. There may be a reference to this by David, centuries later, when he speaks critically of proud men, saying, "they call their lands after their own names" (Ps. 49:11). It is curious, too, that, unlike normal practice, no father is named for Nobah, a rather disrespectful fact.

The seriousness of this chapter is due to the fact that the earth is the Lord's (Ps. 24:1), and therefore land tenure depends on the sufferance of God. As a result, any independent action by Reuben and Gad was strictly subject to a covenant under God and with the other clans. The area east of the Jordan was a rich one then, but also vulnerable. It was the first area from whence captives were taken by the Assyrians from among the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh (1 Chron. 5:26).

Chapter Sixty-One

God's Promise

(Numbers 33:1-56)

1. These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron.
2. And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these are their journeys according to their goings out.
3. And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians.
4. For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them: upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments.
5. And the children of Israel removed from Rameses, and pitched in Succoth.
6. And they departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness.
7. And they removed from Etham, and turned again unto Pihahiroth, which is before Baal-zephon: and they pitched before Migdol.
8. And they departed from before Pi-hahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and went three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and pitched in Marah.
9. And they removed from Marah, and came unto Elim: and in Elim were twelve fountains of water, and threescore and ten palm trees; and they pitched there.
10. And they removed from Elim, and encamped by the Red sea.
11. And they removed from the Red sea, and encamped in the wilderness of Sin.
12. And they took their journey out of the wilderness of Sin, and encamped in Dophkah.
13. And they departed from Dophkah, and encamped in Alush.
14. And they removed from Alush, and encamped at Rephidim, where was no water for the people to drink.
15. And they departed from Rephidim, and pitched in the wilderness of Sinai.
16. And they removed from the desert of Sinai, and pitched at Kibroth-hattaavah.
17. And they departed from Kibroth-hattaavah, and encamped at Hazeroth.
18. And they departed from Hazeroth, and pitched in Rithmah.
19. And they departed from Rithmah, and pitched at Rimmonparez.
20. And they departed from Rimmon-parez, and pitched in Libnah.
21. And they removed from Libnah, and pitched at Rissah.
22. And they journeyed from Rissah, and pitched in Kehelathah.
23. And they went from Kehelathah, and pitched in mount Shapher.
24. And they removed from mount Shapher, and encamped in Haradah.
25. And they removed from Haradah, and pitched in Makheloth.
26. And they removed from Makheloth, and encamped at Tahath.
27. And they departed from Tahath, and pitched at Tarah.
28. And they removed from Tarah, and pitched in Mithcah.

29. And they went from Mithcah, and pitched in Hashmonah.
30. And they departed from Hashmonah, and encamped at Moseroth.
31. And they departed from Moseroth, and pitched in Benejaakan.
32. And they removed from Bene-jaakan, and encamped at Horhagidgad.
33. And they went from Hor-hagidgad, and pitched in Jotbathah.
34. And they removed from Jotbathah, and encamped at Ebronah.
35. And they departed from Ebronah, and encamped at Eziongaber.
36. And they removed from Ezion-gaber, and pitched in the wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh.
37. And they removed from Kadesh, and pitched in mount Hor, in the edge of the land of Edom.
38. And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the LORD, and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the first day of the fifth month.
39. And Aaron was an hundred and twenty and three years old when he died in mount Hor.
40. And king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel.
41. And they departed from mount Hor, and pitched in Zalmonah.
42. And they departed from Zalmonah, and pitched in Punon.
43. And they departed from Punon, and pitched in Oboth.
44. And they departed from Oboth, and pitched in Ije-abarim, in the border of Moab.
45. And they departed from Iim, and pitched in Dibon-gad.
46. And they removed from Dibon-gad, and encamped in Almon-diblathaim.
47. And they removed from Almon-diblathaim, and pitched in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo.
48. And they departed from the mountains of Abarim, and pitched in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho.
49. And they pitched by Jordan, from Beth-jesimoth even unto Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.
50. And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying,
51. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan;
52. Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places:
53. And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it.
54. And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit.

55. But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

56. Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them. (Numbers 33:1-56)

Numbers 33:1-49 is a recapitulation of Israel's journey from Egypt to the Jordan, recorded by Moses as an historical record. It has as its purpose also to remind Israel of how many years they spent in the wilderness because of their unbelief and rebellion. There are three sections to this recapitulation. *First*, Moses cites the march from Egypt to Sinai in vv. 1-15. Then, *second*, he lists the twenty-one encampments from Sinai to Kadesh. Their thirty-seven years of wandering are recorded in the encampments of vv. 19-36, from Rithmah to Kadesh. Finally, and *third*, the move from Kadesh to the Jordan is given in vv. 37-49.²¹⁷

This is an historical record, but an unflattering one, because it is a reminder of the fact that God kept them in the wilderness until the older generation died. It is therefore a reminder of sin. This is echoed in Daniel 9, where Daniel confesses the long history of Israel's apostasies. It is again the background of the public confession of sins in Nehemiah 9. Psalm 106 is the great rehearsal of Israel's journey and sin. Israel, past and present, is presented as a people presuming on God's grace and failing to keep His covenant and its law. Because confession is necessary before restoration, Psalm 106 was a constant reminder that Israel was a straying and apostate people, and God's mercies, many as they are, do not go on unendingly where men persist in their sin. As Kirkpatrick commented on Psalm 106, "The national history is one long record of failure to understand God's purpose and of resistance to His Will."²¹⁸ The people loved a lie, their own lies, rather than the truth of God.

Curiously, v. 12 is a favorite among devout Jews to this day, because Elim had twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. This is allegorized to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel, and the seventy elders of the Sanhedrin.²¹⁹ This kind of interpretation, common to both synagogue and church, replaces meaning with symbolism.

Not all camp sites are listed here. In v. 8, we read that they journeyed three days at one point. Obviously, they did not travel night and day. It is the important camp sites that are listed, and those on their journey, so that the encampment on the shore of the Red Sea after the destruction of Egypt's army is not listed.

Some of these camp sites are still identifiable. Others, because there has been no further history of consequence attached to those sites by Israel or any other people, have been forgotten and cannot be located with any assurance.

Joseph Parker, in commenting on this chapter, made a telling observation about history and biography. He said, "Life is twice written."²²⁰ It is written once and authoritatively and perfectly as God knows it. It is written again in another form in man's memory and man's records. The story of this journey, the various biblical accounts of it in Numbers as elsewhere, is part of God's unerring historical record. Man's histories are usually written in contradiction to God's realities.

James Philip writes that the word “journeys” in v. 1 is sometimes rendered “stages.” One commentator has seen the Hebrew word as related to one that means “plucking up,” i.e., taking up the tent pegs before resuming the march.²²¹

There is an interesting fact about this wilderness journey. Once God had sentenced them to remain in the wilderness, their journeys were in part to locate grazing lands. On occasion, they were close enough to Egypt to make a return to it possible. In their rebellion against God and Moses, they could have easily separated themselves and returned to their land of captivity. It is a grim fact that no actual move was made to return to Egypt. Their attitude was like so many people today: their lust was for the *securities* of slavery together with the *advantages* of freedom. So men move and act today. *Their whole lives are a lie, because they refuse to face up to what they are, and they mask their demands for slavery as expressions of freedom and independence.* Israel never returned to Egypt physically during its wilderness years, but it remained in Egypt spiritually. This travel account is interrupted by a reference to the death of Aaron near the end of their travels (vv. 38-39). Despite his earlier weakness, Aaron had become a faithful high priest, and God here requires that we take note of his death as an important event.

In vv. 50-56, God gives instructions concerning Israel’s treatment of the Canaanites. Israel had come from Egypt, which morally was far superior to Canaan, although their religion was a wretched one. Canaan was a place of radical depravity. It was, apart from private or personal sins, given to religious prostitution, including sodomy and bestiality.

R. Winterbotham summed up God’s requirements in these words:

Consider therefore—

I. That the one great duty of Israel in taking possession of His own land was wholly to dispossess the natives, as being enemies of God and of His worship....

II. That Israel was further required to abolish all their monuments of idolatry, however pleasing and interesting....

III. That the command to exterminate seemed hard, and was ungrateful (no doubt) to most in Israel....

IV. That as a fact the command to extirpate was not obeyed....

V. That as a fact the other command was not obeyed wholly; sometimes graven images were served, sometimes high places turned to the worship of the Lord, to the great detriment and danger of the true faith....

VI. That the remnants of the heathen, if spared, were to become pricks and thorns (*i.e.* constant and dangerous annoyances) to them and would vex them.

VII. That the end of such unfaithfulness, if not amended, was to be expatriation.²²²

God as the Landlord of Canaan and all the earth gave a specific order for the eviction of the Canaanites. Their way of life is often described in Scripture as an “abomination.” God as Lord over all can and does evict nations repeatedly in history; here, He gives a specific command to Israel to do so.

Winterbotham’s summary of what was to be done is again worth citing:

Consider again, with respect to *Canaan*—

- I. That Israel was to possess it, because God had given it to them; it was His, and He chose to do so; no such title was ever granted to any people....
- II. That the grant of Canaan to Israel implied all necessary succour in conquering and occupying it, else had the name of God been disgraced....
- III. That the division of the land was so ordered that equality should as far as possible be preserved, and favouritism made impossible....
- IV. That the Holy Land was delimited before they entered, but the boundaries are to a considerable extent unknown....
- V. That the limits marked down were apparently the natural limits of Canaan, without any reservations.
- VI. That the land actually occupied by Israel was both larger and smaller than delimited; not reaching so far from south to north, yet not so strait from west to east....
- VII. That Kadesh, of famous memory, was specially included in the southern frontier....
- VIII. That the land was allotted to the people by Eleazar their priest and Joshua their captain....
- IX. That together with them there acted princes from each tribe, that justice might be manifestly done to all....²²³

God required that all links with paganism be broken (vv. 50-56). The land was not merely to be occupied but also cleansed. Failure to cleanse the land would mean troubles and finally dispossession. Israel was required to obey because God is the Lord, the Sovereign. The opening declaration of the Ten Commandments, and a prefix to all the laws, is, “I am the LORD thy God” (Exodus 20:2). God as the Sovereign Creator has the absolute right to require whatever He wills, and no man can stay His will. In v. 55, Israel is told:

But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

This is a conditional curse: the terms are spelled out, and the people are told exactly what the consequences of disobedience are. Matthew Henry observed,

Let us hear this and fear. If we do not drive sin out, sin will drive us out; if we be not the death of our lusts, our lusts will be the death of our souls.²²⁴

God does not allow any compromise of His Sovereignty. Men try to lay down rules as to how God should act to be truly God, and this is blasphemy. God tells us who He is; we cannot prescribe a character for God in terms of our thinking, but this is what most men do.

Perhaps the words of G. Campbell Morgan, on v. 56, are the best conclusion:

The most solemn word of all was the last uttered. "And it shall come to pass, that, as I thought to do unto them, so will I do unto you." In these words is revealed an abiding principle, that God's election to blessing is never of persons without reference to conduct, but rather of character which expresses itself in obedience to His will.²²⁵

It is a modern heresy to believe that all God's promises must be sweetness and light. God is not a politician running for the presidency.

Chapter Sixty-Two

The Division of the Land

(Numbers 34:1-29)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
2. Command the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land of Canaan; (this is the land that shall fall unto you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan with the coasts thereof:)
3. Then your south quarter shall be from the wilderness of Zin along by the coast of Edom, and your south border shall be the outmost coast of the salt sea eastward:
4. And your border shall turn from the south to the ascent of Akrabbim, and pass on to Zin: and the going forth thereof shall be from the south to Kadesh-barnea, and shall go on to Hazaraddar, and pass on to Azmon:
5. And the border shall fetch a compass from Azmon unto the river of Egypt, and the goings out of it shall be at the sea.
6. And as for the western border, ye shall even have the great sea for a border: this shall be your west border.
7. And this shall be your north border: from the great sea ye shall point out for you mount Hor:
8. From mount Hor ye shall point out your border unto the entrance of Hamath; and the goings forth of the border shall be to Zedad:
9. And the border shall go on to Ziphron, and the goings out of it shall be at Hazar-enan: this shall be your north border.
10. And ye shall point out your east border from Hazar-enan to Shepham:
11. And the coast shall go down from Shepham to Riblah, on the east side of Ain; and the border shall descend, and shall reach unto the side of the sea of Chinnereth eastward:
12. And the border shall go down to Jordan, and the goings out of it shall be at the salt sea: this shall be your land with the coasts thereof round about.
13. And Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying, This is the land which ye shall inherit by lot, which the LORD commanded to give unto the nine tribes, and to the half tribe:
14. For the tribe of the children of Reuben according to the house of their fathers, and the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received their inheritance; and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance:
15. The two tribes and the half tribe have received their inheritance on this side Jordan near Jericho eastward, toward the sunrising.
16. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
17. These are the names of the men which shall divide the land unto you: Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun.
18. And ye shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land by inheritance.
19. And the names of the men are these: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.

20. And of the tribe of the children of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud.
21. Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon.
22. And the prince of the tribe of the children of Dan, Bukki the son of Jogli.
23. The prince of the children of Joseph, for the tribe of the children of Manasseh, Hanniel the son of Ephod.
24. And the prince of the tribe of the children of Ephraim, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan.
25. And the prince of the tribe of the children of Zebulun, Elizaphan the son of Parnach.
26. And the prince of the tribe of the children of Issachar, Paltiel the son of Azzan.
27. And the prince of the tribe of the children of Asher, Ahihud the son of Shelomi.
28. And the prince of the tribe of the children of Naphtali, Pedahel the son of Ammihud.
29. These are they whom the LORD commanded to divide the inheritance unto the children of Israel in the land of Canaan. (Numbers 34:1-29)

This chapter is concerned with two things: *first*, the borders of the land, as ordained by God for Israel, vv. 1-15; *second*, we have the names of the men who were given the responsibility for dividing the land. These were Joshua, the commander, and Eleazar, the high priest, together with one man from each tribe or clan which had not yet received land. Caleb, who was together with Joshua one of the only two survivors of the old generation, for Moses was chosen to be gone before the conquest, would represent Judah (v. 19).

Like so much else in the Bible, this chapter tells us that, *first* of all, our faith is land-based. We are creatures, made of “the dust of the earth” (Gen. 2:7), and we return to dust with death. We cannot live except on the produce of the earth. Our food, our minerals, oils, building materials, everything, including water, comes from the earth. Where religion becomes “spiritual” and anti-material, we lose our recognition of the limitations of creaturehood, and we lose our awareness of our dependency on the earth. The girl university student of the 1960s, who advocated a work-free world, dismissed a question about how food would be provided by saying, “Food is.” Modern man, knowing little about the sources of all those things that make life and work possible, has lost his sense of reality. Our urban culture has cut man off from his land-based reality, and our media has helped foster many delusions about the nature of life. “The facts of life” now means sex, not food, work, and survival. Modern man has become a sleepwalker on the brink of destruction.

Second, because God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and all things therein (Gen. 1:1), we cannot look down on the material aspects of our lives without despising God. But men, both in and out of the church, insist on doing just this. Years ago, an atheistic philosophy major who saw the universe in Hegelian terms, i.e., as something struggling out of matter towards spirit, dismissed the Biblical God as unworthy of belief. His reason, put crudely, was that an intelligent God would not tie man down to urination and defecation! I told him that that should help him remember that he was a creature. Sadly, too many churchmen over the centuries have shared this contempt for material things, beginning with the flesh.

Third, we are told plainly that our problem is *not matter but sin* (Gen. 3:17-19). The dividing line in life is not spirit versus matter but sin versus grace. Failure to recognize this very obvious fact leads to all kinds of evils, and to a false view of reality. To cite one example among many, many perfectionists insist, “God hates divorce,” when the reality is that God hates sin. Godly divorce is a remedy for sin. God speaks of divorcing Israel (Jer. 3:8). He gives us laws governing divorce (Deut. 24:1-4; Ex. 21:7-11; 1 Cor. 7:11; Matt. 19:3-9; etc.). Because man’s problem is sin, not matter, God uses matter even to protect the spirit, as in the dowry system. While the amount of the dowry is not specifically ordained, two verses give us some idea of it: Exodus 22:17, and, more specifically, Deuteronomy 22:29, which says fifty shekels of silver, then a very sizable amount.

Fourth, God requires a Sabbath of the land (Lev. 25); both man and his work-animals, on the one hand, and the earth on the other, require a Sabbath, a rest. God’s “rest” in Genesis 2:2-3 means a cessation of the work of creation; the rest of man and animals together with the earth means a restoration. Man, by obeying God and recognizing his own creaturely limitations, and those of the earth, thereby praises God for the privilege of being a creature. He 378 *Numbers: Faith, Law, and History* enjoys being God’s creature, and, since man is not a god, he had better rejoice in being God’s creature.

Fifth, because man is a material being of flesh and blood, his life is a material life, and he sins if he forgets this fact. An obvious fact of the Bible is the punishments inflicted for sin. In some instances, it was restitution, in others, capital punishment. Both constituted forms of restoring order. The death penalty was both a penalty for sin and a form of excommunication. In Boecker’s words,

The victim was not permitted to be buried in the burial-place of his family, he was excluded from the community even in death. There is a great deal of material from the history of law and religions enabling us to understand how stoning was regarded as a curse. For the ancients, the criminal was possessed of a real guilt which jeopardized the community. By covering the evildoer with stones outside the town, the evil that he could spread was banished.²²⁶

Even more, the community was maintained on the foundation of God’s covenant and law; godly order meant peace and God’s blessing.

Sixth, God’s covenant with man is inclusive of the earth, so that, in Genesis 2:8-17, God lays down the terms for its possession. After the Flood, God, in His covenant with Noah, makes certain promises with respect to the earth (Gen. 8:15-22). In Deuteronomy 28, the curses and blessings on man involve the earth and the weather. Man’s sin brings a curse upon him, on the earth, and in the weather, whereas faithfulness brings blessings in all spheres. Man’s destiny is linked inseparably to the earth. God’s patience with Canaan was exhausted after many generations; He therefore *required* Israel to execute judgment on Canaan. As Girdlestone pointed out, this judgment was in no way an act of personal revenge by Israel; they were quite alien to the land and the people. “The people almost had to be goaded into the land.” They were not allowed to take plunder, because all the wealth seized had to be given to the Lord. The task of

conquest was not for military glory, nor was it a reward for merit. God was simply honoring His covenant: His goodness to Israel was an act of sovereign mercy and grace. The Canaanites were a depraved people, under judgment by God, and Israel was not to permit things to survive which could lead them into idolatry and perverse forms of sexual practices. Moreover, God had been patient for generations and centuries with Canaan. Their iniquity, their love of evil, had exhausted God's patience, and their judgment was the will of God, not the will of Israel.²²⁷

Seventh, our Promised Land is the whole earth, according to our Lord (Matt. 28:18-20). Christians are reminded of this in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. The method of conquest is different, but we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring all things into captivity to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). In its own way, the opposition we face is as evil and as determined as were the Canaanites.

Eighth, the detailed account in this chapter of the areas to be conquered, i.e., what was in fact the *Promised Land*, is revelatory both of God's ways with us and of our material existence. Joseph Parker stated the matter very ably:

We cannot get rid of boundaries. Never listen to those who talk about equality—simply because you have no time to waste. Equality is impossible. If we were all equal one day, we should all be unequal before the sun went down. Let us listen only to the truly reasonable in this matter. There is something better than outward and nominal equality, and that is an intelligent appreciation of the fact that there must be differences of personality and allotment and responsibility, and that in the end the judgment will be divine in its righteousness. We find boundaries in gifts of all kinds.²²⁸

Parker's dates were 1830-1902; it is a pity that so few took to heart these telling words.

Ninth, God, in giving this carefully described area to Israel, did not hand it to them. Apart from the miraculous conquest of Jericho, all the rest of Canaan was taken, or, more accurately, partially taken only after perseverance and hard battle. It was the *Promised Land*, but it was a land to be earned by the hard lessons of the wilderness journey *and* by a long period of battle. God's promises *to us* as to men of old are not handouts: they come with a necessity for struggle, and victory comes after struggle.

Tenth, this *command* concerning the division of the land is given by God to Moses, but Moses is given no part in anything more than delegating the responsibility to others. His hard years of painful service were nearly over. In Deuteronomy, we have his summary of God's law, and his parting counsel. Very little work remained for him to do. Others must now carry on, fight the battles, and deal with the problems.

Chapter Sixty-Three

Levitical Cities

(Numbers 35:1-8)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying,
2. Command the children of Israel, that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and ye shall give also unto the Levites suburbs for the cities round about them.
- 3 And the cities shall they have to dwell in; and the suburbs of them shall be for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts.
4. And the suburbs of the cities, which ye shall give unto the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the city and outward a thousand cubits round about.
5. And ye shall measure from without the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits and the city shall be in the midst: this shall be to them the suburbs of the cities.
6. And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities.
7. So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their suburbs.
8. And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel: from them that have many ye shall give many; but from them that have few ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth. (Numbers 35:1-8)

In the division of the land, the Levites were to receive no central area, no assigned territory, as were the other tribes. Instead, they were to be given forty-eight cities, of which six were to be cities of refuge. Three of these were to be east of the Jordan, and three on the west. The suburbs refer to the surrounding pasture or orchard areas, and each was to be over two hundred acres in size; some say four hundred and thirteen acres.

The sanctuary was to be centrally located, and there could be only one sanctuary. Weekly worship took place at home, and, later, in the synagogues. However, the Levitical cities were to be strategically located among the twelve clan areas in terms of population centers. They were different from the many existing cities in that they belonged to the Levites and were Levitical centers.

The Levites had a part in temple care and ceremonies, but it was subordinate to that of the priests. In the blessing of Levi by Moses before his death, he cited the fact that this clan had on various occasions, at Sinai, Massah, and Meribah, placed loyalty to God above all other loyalties (Deut. 33:8-9). Their task is described in these words by Moses:

They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. (Deut. 33:10)

The second half of this sentence cites Levi's liturgical functions. Only a small minority of the Levites were ever needed at the tabernacle or temple, so that this function affected a limited number on a rotational basis. The basic Levitical function was to teach God's judgments and God's law.

This meant two things. *First*, Levites were used as judges, because they were experts in the law. *Second*, they were to teach the law: they were the national educators.

Imagine the implications of this if applied to the present. It would mean a network across the United States of Christian schools, colleges, and universities, all concerned with establishing a Christian culture and upholding God's law.

If this seems a visionary idea, we must remember that it once was done to a degree in the United States. Up to about 1900, about seventy-five percent of all U.S. colleges and universities were founded by Scottish Calvinists who were immigrants here. When I was a student, and first learned of this fact, I mentioned it with some awe to an elderly, retired Scottish pastor, a Presbyterian, and he referred to it as a Levitical task. The more trusting ways of his times, and the lack of a Van Tillian presuppositionalism, made it possible in time to subvert all these schools, but it was still a remarkable and Biblical accomplishment.

The Levites were able to go out from these cities to teach in every community; they could also establish in these cities centers of scholarship. A reading of the Old Testament seems to indicate that possibly the Levites were more faithful than the priests. After the Babylonian captivity, Levitical cities apparently were never rebuilt, according to rabbinic tradition.

Levitical city properties could not be alienated. At any time, a Levite could redeem a house he had sold if he had the funds. At the Jubilee, it reverted to him if he had failed to redeem it. The open land could not be sold at all (Lev. 25:29, 34).

In the division of the land, the Levites received four towns in each tribe except Judah and Simeon, where they received a total of nine, and Naphthali, which had only three Levitical cities (Joshua 21).

There was apparently a lack of full faithfulness to this allotment, because the Book of Judges indicates the unsettled and apostate nature of some Levites (Judges 17:7-13). In fact, it would appear from Judges 17:7-13 that some Levites became chaplains to wealthy men, also that their faith was syncretistic, if not pagan (Judges 18:1-31). In 1 Chronicles 6:54-81, we see that the record gives a different story than does Joshua. While there are a similar number of cities, they are not the same: one less in each of Judah and Benjamin, and two less in each of Dan and Zebulun. In other words, some plans and promises were discarded.

In the reformation of Jehoshaphat, the Levites, princes, and priests were used to teach in the cities of Judah, to bring about a return to God's law (2 Chron. 17:7-9). Hezekiah's reformation

also relied on the Levites, among others (2 Chron. 29:3-19). However, at the end of the Babylonian captivity, proportionately fewer Levites returned to Judea (Nehemiah 7:39-45), only seventy-four as against 4,289 priests. In the New Testament, the priests are often mentioned, and the Levites rarely; Ezekiel 44:10-13 indicates that, before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians, the Levites had become especially apostate and deeply involved in idolatry. It is possible that the rise of the synagogue was a replacement of the Levites and their work.

As we have seen in Numbers 18:24-32, the tithe was given to the Levites, who then tithed the tenth of this tithe to the priests. This meant that *instruction*, when this law was obeyed, took priority in the faith and life of the people.

In our day, such an emphasis on education and scholarship on the part of the Christian community would revolutionize and recapitalize society. This law is also one reason why theonomy is unpopular in an age when the institutional church claims the total tithe and denies the right of anyone else to a penny of it!

Over the centuries, this Levitical aspect of God's ministry has been the object of suspicion and control. When the medieval university developed, its scholars were either monks, priests, or friars, i.e., under the jurisdiction of a church-controlled order. Protestantism has been no less eager to control its teachers. This has been an impediment to Christian scholarship. If Christian scholars cannot be trusted, are we to assume that only priests and pastors can be? Is it not wiser to recognize the propensity of all to sin and to trust God's requirements above man's controls? Men too often have more confidence in themselves than in God; they find it a pity that God will not take their advice!

This dispersal of the Levites meant that they were to have "no corporate existence *as a tribe*, but were rather fragmented in this way in a God-appointed isolation." This was to place the stress on their teaching function rather than their corporate status.²²⁹ Our academic lemmings, however, insist on tenure and on a host of controlling academic associations. The result has been a politically correct rigidity and an isolation from reality.

At the same time, the Levites were put together in strategically located cities which were like fortresses of learning. In fact, for no valid reason, a few scholars have tried to see the forty-eight cities as military centers, given their locations. They were, rather, to be centers of intellectual defense. As Calvin wrote,

It was in God's wonderful providence that they (the Levites) were rather placed in peculiar and fixed residences, than allowed to mingle themselves promiscuously with the rest of the people; for the cities which God assigned to them were so many schools, where they might better and more freely engage themselves in teaching the Law, and prepare themselves for performing the office of teaching. For if they had lived indiscriminately among the multitude, they were liable to contract many vices, as well as to neglect the study of the Law, and prepare themselves for performing the office of teaching; but when they were thus collected into separate classes, such an union reminded them that they were divided from the people that they might devote themselves altogether to God.

Besides, their cities were like lamps shining into the very furthest corners of the land. They were therefore fortified, as it were, by walls, lest the corruptions of the people should penetrate to them. Their association together also should have stimulated them mutually to exhort each other to continency, decent and modest manners, temperance, and other virtues worthy of God's servants; whilst, if they fell into dissolute habits, they were the less excusable. Thus their cities were like watch towers in which they might keep guard, so as to drive impiety away from the borders of the holy land. Hence was the light of heavenly doctrine diffused; hence was the seed of life scattered; hence were the examples to be sought of holiness and universal integrity.²³⁰

Calvin's words remind me of two professors at Berkeley, California, at the university, for whom I graded test papers. One felt that the only civilized place for a university was New York City, where a man could be a part of the theatrical, social, and "intellectual" scheme; the other believed that it was not ivory tower thinking for colleges and universities to be isolated so that their focus could be scholarship, not a scene given to trends and fashions.

Our text refers to six cities of refuge, which we shall next study.

Chapter Sixty-Four

Laws of Murder

(Numbers 35:9-34)

9. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
10. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan;
11. Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.
12. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment.
13. And of these cities which ye shall give six cities shall ye have for refuge.
14. Ye shall give three cities on this side Jordan, and three cities shall ye give in the land of Canaan, which shall be cities of refuge.
15. These six cities shall be a refuge, both for the children of Israel, and for the stranger, and for the sojourner among them: that every one that killeth any person unawares may flee thither.
16. And if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.
17. And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.
18. Or if he smite him with an hand weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death.
19. The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer: when he meeteth him, he shall slay him.
20. But if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by laying of wait, that he die;
21. Or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die: he that smote him shall surely be put to death; for he is a murderer: the revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him.
22. But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or have cast upon him any thing without laying of wait,
23. Or with any stone, wherewith a man may die, seeing him not, and cast it upon him, that he die, and was not his enemy, neither sought his harm:
24. Then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood according to these judgments:
25. And the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled: and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high priest, which was anointed with the holy oil.
26. But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled;
27. And the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood:

28. Because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high priest: but after the death of the high priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.
29. So these things shall be for a statute of judgment unto you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.
30. Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die.
31. Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.
32. And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest.
33. So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.
34. Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel. (Numbers 35:9-34)

The six cities of refuge were Levitical cities at strategic points in Israel. They were places for men guilty of involuntary manslaughter to escape to, and hearings were held there to determine their guilt or innocence. The classic example is of men chopping down trees; an axe-head flies loose and kills another man. If the axe-head were known to be loose, or the handle split, the man who used the axe was liable on a murder charge. If, however, the axe appeared to be sound, and the accident was totally unanticipated, then the man was innocent; there was no guilt or malice on his part.

Basic to this law is the fact of vendettas and feuds. Supposedly these are now a thing of the past except in backward areas of Africa or Asia. The Hatfield-McCoy feud in the United States was well known. Despite the veneer of a more civilized behavior, we do have such killings throughout the Western world, and not only among foreign-born elements. More than a few killings today are based on some form of vendetta, whether they are paid, professional killer jobs or “amateur” ones. Our pretenses at advancement do a poor job of covering up reality.

Biblical law recognizes the realities of the human scene and fallen man. It therefore governs where we prefer to ignore the facts of a fallen world. The cities of refuge provided a place of escape for a man pursued by the avenging kinsman of the dead man. In that Levitical city, a thorough hearing was held. If the man were found innocent, he could dwell safely in the city until the death of the high priest. When that death occurred, whether a few weeks or a few decades hence, he was free to leave. If he left earlier, the avenger of family blood could kill him; if he left only after the death of the high priest, then no man could legally touch him.

Since the high priest was a type of Christ, the death of the high priest wiped away all responsibility, however accidental, for the death. All recognized that atonement had been made.

The avenger, or *goel*, was a kinsman. Jesus Christ is declared to be our kinsman-redeemer, our next of kin, who avenges us of our adversary. Isaiah repeatedly refers to God and Christ as the Kinsman-Redeemer of His elect people.

The idea of an avenger of blood seems primitive to modern man. The enforcement of the law against criminals has been transferred from families and persons to the state. If a crime is committed against us, it is up to the discretion of the state's officers whether or not they wish to prosecute. Under the old order of Christendom, prosecution depended on the offended person or family and was mandatory for the civil officers. This is the Biblical pattern. In the case of a murderer, if the Levite court found the killer guilty, his execution could follow in either of two ways: *first*, as in this chapter, the kinsman in charge of the prosecution could execute the man, or, *second*, the community would execute him, usually either by hanging or stoning. Any crime is an offense against God *and* the community. The Levites acted for God in rendering a judgment, and so too did the kinsman and/or the community. In medieval England, this custom or law prevailed, and crosses on the roads to churches could provide refuge until the church staff came to give safe conduct to the church, pending a trial. Even the king had to honor the verdict.

Cities of refuge are also discussed in Deuteronomy 19:1-13 and Joshua 20:1-9.

Verse 15 makes it clear that the cities of refuge applied to both Israelites and foreigners. Anyone could seek sanctuary there, pending the trial. Apparently, according to v. 24, the theocratic community took part in the trial, so that the decision of the court represented the laws of God and the assent of the people.

Instead of being "primitive" law, as some have held, this is law of the highest order, God's law, and two premises are clear. *First*, there must be an intent to kill, or criminal negligence, for the killer to be killed (v. 20-21). *Second*, if a man is indeed guilty of murder, he *must* be killed. Verse 31 makes it clear that there can be no monetary or other substitutions for the life of the killer (see also Ex. 21:12-14; Deut. 19:1-13; Lev. 24:17).

In the cases of accidental killings, there was no *moral* guilt, but there was a *legal* fact of a death. As a result, the man was restricted to the city of refuge.

In God's covenant with Noah, we read,

5. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.
6. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. (Genesis 9:5-6)

The sad fact is that even one of the better commentators has referred to the fact of man's creation in the image of God as a "notion." It is no wonder that the church is so impotent.

One of the myths of our time is that "impartial" judgment must prevail in the courts. This is a foolish belief, because, *first* of all, a judge must be partial to justice. There is a difference between ascertaining the facts and favoring one side or another. The judge must favor justice and the innocent person. *Second*, in Deuteronomy 19:20, it is clearly stated that the *local* elders or judges shall have jurisdiction (together with Levitical guidance). Now, a change of venue is

sought, and trials are actually held at times without notifying the victim. Since it is “the state” versus the criminal, the victim can be ignored, especially if plea-bargaining is the course of action being taken.

In the trial, the evidence of two or more witnesses, or more than one kind of evidence, was necessary for conviction (v. 30). The presumption of innocence until proven guilty governs in Biblical law. Not even confession is sufficient for conviction: it requires corroboration before it can be used. There is a very important aspect to this law which must not be overlooked. God *commands* the avenging of blood; He requires both the family and the community to be a part of this justice process, together with the Levites. It is not presented, as with feuds and vendettas, as a matter of family honor but as a requirement under God. It is therefore a very serious error to compare it to feuds and vendettas, to a Hatfield and McCoy world. The cities of refuge and the duty of the Levites move it from the local realm to a religious duty. God *requires* it of the family and the community to bring about justice, whether a guilty verdict or an acquittal. The matter cannot be reduced to a purely human level. It is not family honor but God’s honor that is at stake. The avenger of blood, unlike the vendetta and feud scene, *cannot* exact vengeance on innocent members of the family of the man who has sought refuge in a Levitical city. In the vendetta and feud, innocent members of the fleeing man’s family are routinely murdered. God *requires* that only the guilty suffer. As a result, the tendency of scholars to place this law in the realm of family vendettas and clan feuds is idiotic and perverse.

As we have seen, *first*, a basic premise of this law is that man is made in the image of God; it is therefore a serious offense in the sight of God when murder takes place. God makes it clear all through the Bible that He will not forget the shedding of blood and will exact vengeance on the nation that does not administer justice.

Second, we have a key premise set forth in vv. 33-34:

33. So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

34. Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the LORD dwell among the children of Israel.

Like statements are very common in the whole of the Bible. We are told that unpunished murder pollutes, profanes, and dirties up a land. The land *cannot* then be cleansed except “by the blood of him that shed it.” Where people claim to be God’s people, He dwells also, and to defile such a land brings an especial judgment. After a time, God ceases from all partial judgments and brings about a radical and total one. As we are told in Isaiah 1:5,

Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

The country that will not punish crime will be punished by God; the country that will not execute murderers will be executed by God.

Chapter Sixty-Five

Inheritance or Succession

(Numbers 36:1-13)

1. And the chief fathers of the families of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near, and spake before Moses, and before the princes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel:
2. And they said, The LORD commanded my lord to give the land for an inheritance by lot to the children of Israel: and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters.
3. And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then shall their inheritance be taken from the inheritance of our fathers, and shall be put to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance.
4. And when the jubile of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.
5. And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph hath said well.
6. This is the thing which the LORD doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them marry to whom they think best; only to the family of the tribe of their father shall they marry.
7. So shall not the inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe: for every one of the children of Israel shall keep himself to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers.
8. And every daughter, that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers.
9. Neither shall the inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; but every one of the tribes of the children of Israel shall keep himself to his own inheritance.
10. Even as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad:
11. For Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married unto their father's brothers' sons:
12. And they were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father.
13. These are the commandments and the judgments, which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. (Numbers 36:1-13)

In Numbers 27:1-11, we see that daughters could be heirs. This chapter does not contradict that fact but supplements it. The question raised is of another sort, namely, what happened to the clan lands if such female heiresses married outside the clan. If a girl were not an heiress, then it made no difference whom she married and what his clan or tribal affiliations were, but, if an heiress,

her marriage to another would mean the breakup of the integrity of clan lands; her possession would then go, possibly, to men of another tribe. Moreover, in a jubilee year, to whom would such lands revert, if an interclan marriage took place?

Because the Bible is a land-based book, and our faith tied to the earth as the Lord's (Ps. 24:1), the question is not an academic one. For modern man, land has become a commodity and an investment, not essentially a faith inheritance. Our modern outlook thus warps our perspective. For this reason, our federal government thinks nothing of allowing in as immigrants an increasing number of people who are religiously and racially hostile to us. They see no relationship between faith and land. As a result, the United States and the Western world have embarked on a suicidal course. They reject the concept of Christendom and embrace instead the humanistic "family of man," and thus immigration policies in the U.S. and Europe are based on myths and illusions of a destructive nature. Because neither land nor inheritance is now seen from the perspective of faith, we have problems in these spheres. The modern state sees itself as the primary owner, and hence eminent domain is basic to its life, and it therefore views itself as the primary heir with death taxes. Both a tax on the land and death taxes are anti-Biblical.

A disregard for ties to the land has been one of the most destructive forces of the twentieth century. In Africa, artificial nations were created after World War II without regard for the fact that they encompassed rival warring tribes. Artificial unions such as Yugoslavia were created after World War I, bringing together differing peoples and religious groups. All such efforts have simply created chaos and conflict. The rationalistic planners of our time are Hegelians: for them, *the rational is the real*, and their rational ideas become a Procrustean bed on which humanity is tortured.

Scholars as a result fail to see the importance of this chapter, because, as one has observed, "The question of inheritance as such is not a living issue with us today." Unhappily, he is in one sense clearly right; when people out of envy for the rich vote in inheritance taxes, they clearly do not see the matter as religious in essence, and neither do they see their envy and the resulting tax for what they are, *sin*.

The daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1-11) were members of the tribe of Manasseh, but all the clans were concerned, because they feared a breakup of local loyalties and land ownership. It was these girls who had originally petitioned Moses about heirship. None now challenged that fact. However, the clan leaders of the subclan these girls belonged to now raised the question.

The clan or tribe is an extended family; the modern outlook is that such loyalties represent provincialism. It is true that some groups have been very shortsighted and provincial, but vast nations such as the United States have been equally shortsighted and provincial. The greatest intellectual influence exercised by Germany, for example, was when it was not one nation but many small principalities. From before the Reformation until the time of Bismarck, these small German states, some very, very limited in area, were the intellectual and scientific centers of the world. It has been since about 1850 that bigness has been equated with superiority.

Calvin raised the question, why did God not answer this aspect of the inheritance problem when the daughters of Zelophehad raised the question in Numbers 27:1-11? He felt that this was an

important aspect of this problem. His answer was, "In short, whereas God might have spontaneously anticipated this, He preferred to grant it at the request of those who asked nothing but what was just and equitable."²³¹ He thus preferred that men see the implication of things and then enquire of Him.

As Calvin pointed out, God gives women free permission to marry, but they cannot alienate the paternal inheritance insofar as the land is concerned.²³² We can add that if the man chose to become a member of his wife's clan and renounce his own, no problem would then arise. He would not then receive land from his own clan.

The answer God gave through Moses was that the daughters who were heiresses should marry someone from their own subclan (v. 6- 9). The daughters of Zelophehad, apparently with God's permission through Moses, decided to marry cousins on their father's side (v. 11- 12). This was normally not permitted. We meet with one other instance of such unions in 1 Chronicles 23:21-22, where the daughters of a man without a male heir married their cousins.

At this point, a very, very important fact must be confronted. Our concept of *inheritance* is a modern one. It means, strictly, the acquisition of property by one person on the death of another. This is a sterile, one-generational idea, and it is thoroughly alien to what the Bible means by *inheritance*. Another word may perhaps give us some idea of what the Biblical doctrine means: *succession*. Naboth, in facing Ahab's attempt to buy him out at a very good price, refused. His property was a trust from his forefathers to the generations yet to come, and it was not his to sell or to profit by to the exclusion of future generations (1 Kings 21:3). Naboth saw himself as a link in a *succession* of generations. This is why adoption was important in antiquity.

We meet with adoption first of all in Genesis 48:5-6, although in this case Jacob *adopts* his two grandsons by Joseph as his own sons (Ephraim and Manasseh). Much more important, however, is the use of adoption in theology: God is the adopting father of Israel (Ex. 4:22; Deut. 8:5, 14:1, etc.). Of course, the New Testament speaks of Christians as adopted sons by God's sovereign grace.

The purpose of adoption was to create a *succession of faith, authority, and responsibility*. We see the word succession used with reference to royalty and the nobility; it has always meant a transfer of responsibility and custody. In one instance in England, where a gentleman not of the nobility lost an 800 year old family inheritance because two quick deaths led to confiscatory taxation, what was involved was a town and many farms. All had been under the family's government and protection for generations, and they wept as the family left the ancient home and estate. The *succession* in this case had been one of godly men who had inherited responsibilities and had discharged them faithfully under God.

It is this doctrine of *succession* which modern society has virtually destroyed, and this is why commentators on chapters such as this are so blind.

By God's grace, I come from a family which lived for almost all the Christian era until 1915 in one place, and by God's grace we may live for generations on our present land.

The concept of *succession* is a doctrine which holds that all property and wealth is a trust from past generations to the ones to come. Our responsibility is not to use and burn up wealth, but to increase wealth for God's glory and Kingdom, and to enrich our children's children in every way for His service and possession.

Historically, conversion from one religion to another has meant disinheritance all over the world, because the convert is now a member of a different law-system and is therefore an heir to its wealth of faith, and he is the founder of a new line of succession.

It should now be apparent how narrow and existentialist modern man has become on the subject of inheritance. His thinking, however fact-filled, has lost a sense of history because he has severed himself from the God over all history.

It is noteworthy that the existentialist economist, Lord Keynes (a homosexual as well), developed his economic theory with a mindlessness about the future. Asked once about the consequences of his thinking, he answered, "In the long run we are all dead." Any non-Biblical approach to inheritance is a love of death.

The Author

Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001) was a well-known American scholar, writer, and author of over thirty books. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of California and received his theological training at the Pacific School of Religion. An ordained minister, he worked as a missionary among Paiute and Shoshone Indians and pastored two California churches. He founded the Chalcedon Foundation, an educational organization devoted to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. His writing in the *Chalcedon Report* and his numerous books spawned a generation of believers active in reconstructing the world to the glory of Jesus Christ. Until his death, he resided in Vallecito, California, where he engaged in research, lecturing, and assisting others in developing programs to put the Christian Faith into action.

The Ministry of Chalcedon

CHALCEDON (kal-see-don) is a Christian educational organization devoted exclusively to research, publishing, and cogent communication of a distinctively Christian scholarship to the world at large. It makes available a variety of services and programs, all geared to the needs of interested ministers, scholars, and laymen who understand the propositions that Jesus Christ speaks to the mind as well as the heart, and that His claims extend beyond the narrow confines of the various institutional churches. We exist in order to support the efforts of all orthodox denominations and churches. Chalcedon derives its name from the great ecclesiastical Council of Chalcedon (AD 451), which produced the crucial Christological definition: "Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man...." This formula directly challenges every false claim of divinity by any human institution: state, church, cult, school, or human assembly. Christ alone is both God and man, the unique link between heaven and earth. All human power is therefore derivative: Christ alone can announce that, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Historically, the Chalcedonian creed is therefore the foundation of Western liberty, for it sets limits on all authoritarian human institutions by acknowledging the validity of the claims of the One who is the source of true human freedom (Galatians 5:1).

The Chalcedon Foundation publishes books under its own name and that of Ross House Books. It produces a magazine, *Faith for All of Life*, and a newsletter, *The Chalcedon Report*, both bimonthly. All gifts to Chalcedon are tax deductible. For complimentary trial subscriptions, or information on other book titles, please contact:

Chalcedon
PO Box 158
Vallecito, CA 95251 USA
(209) 736-4365
www.chalcedon.edu

¹ Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, vol. 5, *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), xxv-xxvi.

² Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint of 1883 edition), 225.

³ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 5.

⁴ Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint of 1864 edition), 379.

⁵ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, 1962), 569.

⁶ W. Gunther Plaut, "Numbers," in W. G. Plaut, B. J. Bamberger, and W. W. Hallo, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York, NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1031.

⁷ Vacher Burch, *Anthropology and the Apocalypse* (London, England: Macmillan, 1939), 202.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹ Roderick Campbell, *Israel and the New Covenant* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1954), 91, cf. 140.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143

¹¹ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprint of 1933 edition), 473.

¹² F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible: The Books of the Law* (New York, NY: Loizeaux Brothers, 1899), 387.

¹³ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 3, *Leviticus-Numbers 26* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.), 154.

¹⁴ Publisher's note: The author preached these chapters as sermons between November 1990 and May 1992. On Sunday Dec. 23, 1990, the week that Numbers 3:40-51 would have normally been covered, Rev. Rushdoony interrupted his writing/ preaching schedule in order to preach a topical Christmas sermon, and when he returned to his writing, he began with Numbers 4, inadvertently omitting chapter 3:40-51. That is why these verses are not covered herein. Unfortunately, this omission was not discovered until after the author's death when the handwritten text was being prepared for publication.

¹⁵ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, 1962), 588.

-
- ¹⁶ James Philip, *Numbers: The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 72.
- ¹⁷ Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 235.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 389.
- ¹⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 85.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 86n.
- ²¹ John Sherdy, *Numbers* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 51.
- ²² Sforno, *Commentary on the Torah*, vol. 2, trans. and explanatory notes Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1989), 592.
- ²³ Wenham, *Numbers*, 88.
- ²⁴ *The Stockton (California) Record*, January 20, 1991, A 14.
- ²⁵ Ed., "Benedictions," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 488.
- ²⁶ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 56.
- ²⁷ J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible by Various Writers* (New York, NY: Macmillan 1942), 105.
- ²⁸ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 3, *Leviticus-Numbers 26* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnall, n.d.), 163-64.
- ²⁹ Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Regency, 1990), 755.
- ³⁰ Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1984), 40.
- ³¹ John Peter Lange, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint of 1879 edition), 148.
- ³² Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 63.
- ³³ George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Numbers* (Boston, MA: Henry A. Young, 1870), 119.
- ³⁴ A.R.S. Kennedy, ed., *Leviticus and Numbers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 234, 236.

³⁵ Charles R. Erdman, *The Book of Numbers* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1952), 35-36.

³⁶ A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T.C. & E.C. Jack, n.d.), 240.

³⁷ John Sturdy, *Numbers* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 73.

³⁸ Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint of 1883 edition), 125.

³⁹ G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1959), 66.

⁴⁰ A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T.C. & E.C. Jack, n.d.), 241. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 102.

⁴¹ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 75.

⁴² B. Maarsingh, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 36.

⁴³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1979), 103-05.

⁴⁴ T. E. Espin, "Numbers," in F.C. Cook, ed., *The Holy Bible, with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (London, England: John Murray, 1871), 684.

⁴⁵ W. Binnie, in H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary: Numbers* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 85.

⁴⁶ J. Baldwin Brown, cited in *The Sermon Bible*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 276.

⁴⁷ T. E. Espin, "Numbers," in F.C. Cook, ed., *The Holy Bible, with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (London, England: John Murray, 1871), 688.

⁴⁸ F. B. Huey Jr., *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Lamplighter Books, 1981), 43.

⁴⁹ John Knox, from "Upon the First Temptation of Christ," 1556, in Hilda Noel Schroetter, ed., *Great Thoughts from John Knox* (London, England: William Collins Sons and Co., n.d.), 44.

⁵⁰ C. J. Elliott, "Numbers," in C. J. Elliott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 512.

⁵¹ Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible...with Explanatory Notes*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830), 444.

⁵² Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Regency, 1990), 786.

-
- ⁵³ Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers: Journey to God's Rest-Land* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), 52.
- ⁵⁴ Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 49-50.
- ⁵⁵ A. Noordtzi, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 96.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.
- ⁵⁷ Sforzo, *Commentary on the Torah*, vol. 2, trans. and explanatory notes Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1989), 615. Pelcovitz is citing the *Sifre*.
- ⁵⁸ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 3, *Leviticus-Numbers* 26 (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 192-93.
- ⁵⁹ A. Noordtzi, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 99.
- ⁶⁰ John Uguhart, *The New Biblical Guide*, vol. 4 (Chicago, IL: W. R. Blessing, n.d.), 153-55.
- ⁶¹ N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (London, England: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967), 230.
- ⁶² Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible...with Explanatory Notes*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830), 444.
- ⁶³ A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T.C. & E.C. Jack, n.d.), 252.
- ⁶⁴ R.K. Harrison, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1990), 190.
- ⁶⁵ C. J. Elliott, "Numbers" in C. J. Elliott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 515.
- ⁶⁶ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, vol. 1 (Maclean, VA: Macdonald Publishing Company, n.d.), 285.
- ⁶⁷ G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1959), 67.
- ⁶⁸ John Gill, *Gill's Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprint, n. d.), 607.
- ⁶⁹ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 103.
- ⁷⁰ Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, vol. 5, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glen W. Barker (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 136.
- ⁷¹ W. Binnie, in H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary: Numbers* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 135.

-
- ⁷² Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 156.
- ⁷³ Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 151.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁵ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 108.
- ⁷⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 120.
- ⁷⁷ B. Maarsingh, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 47.
- ⁷⁸ George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Numbers* (Boston, MA: Henry A. Young, 1870), 193.
- ⁷⁹ R.K. Harrison, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990), 207.
- ⁸⁰ A. Noordtzi, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 124.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 125.
- ⁸² Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 120.
- ⁸³ J. H. Newman, in *The Sermon Bible*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 281-82.
- ⁸⁴ F. B. Huey Jr., *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Lamplighter Books, 1981), 55.
- ⁸⁵ D. Young, in H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary: Numbers* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 169.
- ⁸⁶ B. Maarsingh, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 50.
- ⁸⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 91.
- ⁸⁸ Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Fever, *Tehillim/Psalms*, vol. 4 (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1982), 1183.
- ⁸⁹ Ronald B. Allen, in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Regency, 1990), 828.
- ⁹⁰ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 119- 20.
- ⁹¹ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 123.
- ⁹² Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 130.

⁹³ Riggans, *Numbers*, 123.

⁹⁴ Ronald B. Allen, in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Regency, 1990), 829.

⁹⁵ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 3, *Leviticus-Numbers 26* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 230.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 231-32.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁹⁹ R. K. Harrison, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1990), 230.

¹⁰⁰ Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 193.

¹⁰¹ Riggans, *Numbers*, 127.

¹⁰² A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers* (New York, NY: Henry Frowde, n.d.), 279-80.

¹⁰³ Cited by George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Numbers* (Boston, MA: Henry A. Young, 1870), 246.

¹⁰⁴ B. Maarsingh, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 61.

¹⁰⁵ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 455.

¹⁰⁶ Martin Noth, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), 130.

¹⁰⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 119.

¹⁰⁸ Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Regency, 1990), 843.

¹⁰⁹ C. J. Elliott, "Numbers," in Charles John Elliott, ed., *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 529.

¹¹⁰ W. Gunther Plaut, "Numbers," in W. G. Plaut, B. J. Bamberger, and W. W. Hallo, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York, NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1132.

-
- ¹¹¹ James Philip, *Numbers: The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 201.
- ¹¹² J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, 1962), 645.
- ¹¹³ Carl A. Anderson, "Numbers," in Herbert C. Allenan and Elmer E. Flack, eds., *Old Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: Mullenberg Press, 1957), 285.
- ¹¹⁴ T. E. Espin, "Numbers," in F. C. Cook, ed., *The Holy Bible, with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (London, England: John Murray, 1871), 714.
- ¹¹⁵ A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers* (New York, NY: Henry Frowde, n.d.), 291.
- ¹¹⁶ B. Maarsingh, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 65.
- ¹¹⁷ N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (London, England: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967), 267.
- ¹¹⁸ Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 216.
- ¹¹⁹ B. Maarsingh, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 66.
- ¹²⁰ J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1942), 110.
- ¹²¹ Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible... with Explanatory Notes*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Armstrong, 1830), 465.
- ¹²² James Philip, *Numbers: The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 212.
- ¹²³ See A. R. S. Kennedy, "Red Heifer," in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 207-10; Arie Strikovsky, "Red Heifer," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14 (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing Co., 1971), 9-13; and A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers* (New York, NY: Henry Frowde, n.d.), 296-301.
- ¹²⁴ A. R. S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 298.
- ¹²⁵ A. Noordtjij, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 170.
- ¹²⁶ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 149.
- ¹²⁷ J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, 1962), 652.
- ¹²⁸ R. Winterbotham, in H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary: Numbers* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 242.

-
- ¹²⁹ Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint of 1883 edition), 168.
- ¹³⁰ R. D. B. Rawnsley, from *Village Sermons*, cited in *The Sermon Bible*, vol. 1, *Genesis to 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 285-86.
- ¹³¹ Herman Broch, *The Sleepwalkers* (London, England: Martin Secker, 1932), 559.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, 301, 375, 628-29.
- ¹³³ John Sturdy, *Numbers* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 142.
- ¹³⁴ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 3, *Leviticus-Numbers 26* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 263-64.
- ¹³⁵ H. P. Liddon, cited in *The Sermon Bible*, vol. 1, *Genesis to 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 287-88.
- ¹³⁶ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 179.
- ¹³⁷ F. Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), 63.
- ¹³⁸ James Philip, *Numbers* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 239.
- ¹³⁹ F. B. Huey Jr., *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, Lamplighter Books, 1981), 81.
- ¹⁴⁰ Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1964), 98.
- ¹⁴¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 168.
- ¹⁴² See J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, England: Soncino Press, 1962), 671.
- ¹⁴³ J. H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, cited in *The Sermon Bible*, vol.1, *Genesis to 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), 291-92.
- ¹⁴⁴ Cornelius Van Til, "Confessing Jesus Christ," in John K. Skilton, ed., *Scripture and Confession* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), 227.
- ¹⁴⁵ Cornelius Van Til, *The New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1974), 25.
- ¹⁴⁶ Nancy Mitford, *The Sun King* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1966), 114.

¹⁴⁷ Sforno, *Commentary on the Torah*, vol. 2, trans. and explanatory notes Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1989), 689.

¹⁴⁸ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament, and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1956), 99.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 103.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 450.

¹⁵¹ John Roberts, "Introduction" to Marcus Cunliffe, *The Age of Expansion, 1847-1917* (Springfield, MA: Merrian, 1974), 9.

¹⁵² Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), 499.

¹⁵³ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament, and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1956), 101.

¹⁵⁴ Albert Edwards, *Erotica Judaica: A Sexual History of the Jews* (New York, NY: Julian Press, 1967), 56.

¹⁵⁵ John Urguhart, *The New Biblical Guide, or, Recent Discoveries and the Bible*, vol. 4 (Chicago, IL: W. P. Blessing, n.d.), 298.

¹⁵⁶ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 188.

¹⁵⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (Philadelphia, PA: David McKay, n.d.), 132.

¹⁵⁸ A.R.S. Kennedy, *Leviticus and Numbers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, n.d.), 334.

¹⁵⁹ George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Numbers* (Boston, MA: Henry A. Young, 1870), 407.

¹⁶⁰ Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), 105

¹⁶¹ Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 313.

¹⁶² James Philip, *Numbers: The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 268.

¹⁶³ Cited in John Peter Lange, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 148.

¹⁶⁴ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 196- 97.

¹⁶⁵ Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 326.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 3, *Leviticus-Numbers 26* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 134-35.

¹⁶⁷ H. B. Clark, *Biblical Law* (Portland, OR: Binfords & Mort, 1944), 3.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 200.

¹⁷⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 256.

¹⁷¹ N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (London, England: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1967), 310.

¹⁷² Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 4, *Numbers 27 - Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 10.

¹⁷³ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Duchamp's Transformers* (Venice, CA: Lapis Press, 1990), 12. "The translation has been assisted by a grant from the French Ministry of Culture."

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22-23. For Duchamp's desire to transform his image into a female one, to obliterate differences, see 32-33., 50, 114-15.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 65, 68-70, 76, 87.

¹⁷⁶ John Sturdy, *Numbers* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 197.

¹⁷⁷ Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Regency, 1990), 948.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 949.

¹⁷⁹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949 reprint), 217.

¹⁸⁰ John Peter Lange, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 162.

¹⁸¹ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 206.

¹⁸² Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), 111.

¹⁸³ Sforno, *Commentary on the Torah*, vol. 2, trans. and explanatory notes Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1989), 703.

¹⁸⁴ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 87.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁸⁶ Cited in John Peter Lange, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, n.d.), 162.

¹⁸⁷ Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint of 1883 edition), 217-18.

¹⁸⁸ A. Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were in the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York, NY: Hodder & Houghton, n.d.), 288-94.

¹⁸⁹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 204-05.

¹⁹⁰ B. Maarsingh, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 102-03.

¹⁹¹ Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), 117-18.

¹⁹² Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus* (London, England: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 417-18.

¹⁹³ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 179- 80.

¹⁹⁴ S.R. Driver and H.A. White, "Atonement, Day of," in James Hastings, ed., *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1898), 201.

¹⁹⁵ "Atonement," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1971), 831.

¹⁹⁶ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, 1897), 147-48.

¹⁹⁷ Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible...with Explanatory Notes*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Armstrong, 1830), 500.

¹⁹⁸ Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Zechariah* (London, England: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 234-35.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 236-37.

²⁰⁰ G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1959), 73.

²⁰¹ Gunther Busch, "A Novel of Shock, Auto-da-Fe," in Michael Hulse, trans., *Essays in Honor of Elias Canetti* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987), 319.

²⁰² Jacob Isaacs, "An Assessment of Twentieth Century Literature," in *ibid.*, 305.

²⁰³ Ernst Waldinger, "Comedie Humaine of the Insane," in *ibid.*, 300-01.

²⁰⁴ Peter von Haselberg, "Experimenting with the Novel," in *ibid.*, 297.

²⁰⁵ Stephen H. Kaszunski, "Dialogue and Poetics: On the Dialogic Character of Canetti's Notebooks," in *ibid.*, 216.

²⁰⁶ Robert A. Watson, *The Book of Numbers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 363-64.

²⁰⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol.2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 414.

²⁰⁸ Allen Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica: A Sexual History of the Jews* (New York, NY: Julian Press, 1967), 15.

²⁰⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 263-64.

²¹⁰ Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), 116.

²¹¹ Jeannie Williams, "News and Views," *USA Today*, February 5, 1992, 2D.

²¹² Martin Noth, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1968), 230-31.

²¹³ Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Regency, 1990), 967.

²¹⁴ T. E. Espin, "Numbers," in F. C. Cook, ed., *The Holy Bible, with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (London, England: John Murray, 1871), 766.

²¹⁵ John Sturdy, *Numbers* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 223.

²¹⁶ N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (London, England: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1967), 331.

²¹⁷ Irving L. Jensen, *Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964), 118-19.

²¹⁸ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 624.

²¹⁹ Walter Riggans, *Numbers* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1983), 234.

²²⁰ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol.4, *Numbers 27 - Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 26.

²²¹ James Philip, *Numbers: The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 330.

²²² R. Winterbotham, in H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary: Numbers* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 438-39.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 439-40.

²²⁴ Cited in George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Numbers* (Boston, MA: Henry A. Young, 1870), 461.

²²⁵ G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 75.

²²⁶ Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East* (London, England: SPCK, 1980), 40.

²²⁷ Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 280.

²²⁸ Joseph Parker, *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*, vol. 4, *Numbers 27-Deuteronomy* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.), 44.

²²⁹ James Philip, *Numbers: The Communicator's Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 345.

²³⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint), 249-50.

²³¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol.4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950), 260.

²³² *Ibid.*, 261-62.